

SERMONS

ON THE

EVILS THAT ARE IN THE WORLD.

AND ON

VARIOUS OTHER TOPICS;

FROM THE GERMAN OF THE

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SERMON I.

Of the Evils that are in the World.

'**G**OD, to thy benignity all thy works bear witness. Thy sovereign benignity, the most exalted, most effective inclination to impart thyself, and to diffuse life and happiness around thee, moved thee to create the heavens and the earth with all their inhabitants. Thy benignity it was, that, amidst the innumerable multiplicity of thy creatures, called mankind into being, and designed them for happiness. To thee, o God, our creator and our father, we offer up the tribute of grateful homage for existence, and for being that, which thy benignity ordained us to be. Indeed feeble, limited, frail creatures; but even such creatures should rejoice in their existence and in thy bounty, experience the effects of thy favourable regards; and enjoy the happiness which they are capable of enjoying. Far, far be it from us to be dissatisfied with the

capacities which thou hast given us, with the bounds which thou hast prescribed to us, with the place which thou hast allotted us in thy kingdom, with the burdens which thou hast laid on us, with the tasks which thou hast assigned us, with the purposes to which thou hast appointed us, or to charge thee, the All-bountiful, with any defect of goodness! No; thou art love: all thy works are blameless: all that thou disposest and dost is right. Even there, where we, short-sighted beings, behold and feel pure evil, there thy wise paternal providence discerns the fittest means for our preservation, our improvement, our perfection. Evil and good, means and end, present and future, present themselves at once to thee, and thus thou beholdest with complacency, order and beauty in all thy works. Oh might we be illumined by a ray of thy light to enable us to judge more justly concerning what we are and in the ultimate tendencies of thy divine administration are designed to be! Oh might we never entertain a doubt of thy goodness, but even when we suffer and feel our infirmity, or smart under the consequences of our follies and transgressions, — even when we are forced to die, recognize and believe that thou lovest us with parental tenderness, and art solicitous for our welfare! Ah bless to this end the considerations in which we are about to be employed. Cause them to
advance

advance us in that salutary knowledge, and strengthen us in that soothing belief. These our requests we offer up unto thy divine majesty in the name of Jesus our saviour, addressing thee further, as he vouchsafed to teach us. Our father, &c.

DEUTERONOMY XXXii. 4.

His work is perfect : for all his ways are judgment.

TO incite you, my pious hearers, to acquiescence in all the arrangements and dispensations of providence, to a constant delight in God and in our relations to him, to the glad and grateful enjoyment of his bounties, and thus to render you better and happier, is the uniform tendency of all the doctrines of religion and christianity ; is also the uniform tendency of all the ideas of those doctrines which we endeavour to give you. In this view it is, that we so frequently declare to you, from the most intimate conviction, that God is consummately good, that love is essential to his nature, that he governs his creatures with the utmost lenity and forbearance, that he judges them with the most perfect equity, that he is more inclined to bless than to punish, and in all that he commands or forbids, in all that he gives or denies them, he seeks their happiness alone. This is no less true, my dear friends, than that he is God ; and I know no other method for becoming truly good and

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happy,

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happy, and for still remaining so, than by the lively persuasion of those truths and their steady application to all the events and actions of our lives, to all that we are and do, and to whatever befalls us.

Nevertheless, mankind are but too much disposed to call those truths in question : and the more frequently and strongly they doubt of them, the farther do they depart from the way of piety and happiness. These doubts chiefly arise from the consideration and sentiment of the manifold evils, natural and moral, that exist in the world and among mankind. These evils we know not always how to reconcile with the consummate goodness of God, with his infinite benevolence towards the human race. They rather seem to be the ordinances and dispensations of an austere despotic master, than of a tender and indulgent parent ; to be more the effects of apathy or severity, than of kindness and affection.

How feeble, it is said, how circumscribed in all respects is man ! How many are his wants and how difficult to be supplied ! How many unpleasant, repugnant, noxious impressions are made on him by outward things ! How often does he exert his faculties in vain ! How often does he spend his strength for nought ! How often does he fail of his purpose ! How many cares, how much trouble and sorrow are mingled
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with the short and fleeting satisfactions of his life! To how many dangers and misfortunes, to how many pains and sicknesses is he obnoxious! And how frequently does he fall a prey to the treachery of error, the delusions of vice, to sordid affections and destructive passions! What devastation and havoc are committed by folly and sin in domestic, in civil, in human society! What crimes, what horrors, are perpetrated among mankind! And how dreadful is death, which terminates this long series of evils! How can a being, who is possessed at once of sovereign power and infinite benignity, who loves mankind with more than parental tenderness, ordain or permit all this to happen?

Thus, my pious hearers, does a man but too frequently reflect, in those gloomy hours or moments when he is prevented, by some disagreeable sensation, some adverse event, from seeing clearly and from judging impartially. Thus does he call in question the primary, the most decided truth, the truth, that God is love; and thus is his belief in that truth, which ought always to be a governing and regulating principle in him, impaired, and rendered inefficient, at least for a time. Happy should I be, could I remove these doubts from you, my devout audience, or so arm you against them, as to enable you to come off victorious in the hour of temptation and distress! This however cannot better
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be effected than by calm and sedate reflection on the things which we call evils, and which likewise are evils. These reflections will teach us how justly the prophet affirms in our text, that the work of God is perfect; that all his ways are judgment.

You know, my pious hearers, that the various evils in the world are divided into two classes or species. The one is called physical or natural, the other moral evil. By the former are understood such evils as depend not on our moral conduct, on our good or bad dispositions and actions, but are grounded in our nature and frame, and in the nature and combination of external circumstances and objects. On the other hand, by the latter, are implied, such evils as solely or principally proceed from our nefarious conduct, from our wicked dispositions and actions. Not of these, but of the former, we intend now to discourse. Let us therefore consider what is termed natural evil, and examine how we are to regard it for forming a right judgment of it, and for reconciling it with the consummate goodness of God.

Ignorance, error, weakness, pain, multifarious wants, toilsome labour, bad success of it, unfortunate events, sensibility to hostile impressions from without, opposition, obstacles and difficulties in what we design and execute, sickness, dissolution and death: these and the like

like are called natural evils. For rightly judging whereof, we will now endeavour to set two propositions in a proper light. The first is : Many things which we call evils, are merely the necessary limitations of our nature and powers. The second : Many others are salutary cautions against far greater evils.

First then there are many things which we call evils, and yet which, when considered abstractedly in themselves, are no more than the necessary limitations of our nature and faculties ; and he that complains of these evils, complains that he is a man, and what is that but complaining that man exists ? Man is man, my pious hearers ; I repeat it, Man is man. This, little as it may seem to say, is expressive of much. Man is therefore on one hand not a stone, not a plant, not merely a machine, not simply animal ; but so likewise is he on the other hand not pure spirit, not an angel, no still higher being. As little then as the properties of a stone, of a plant, of an irrational animal befit him ; just so little also are the privileges or the powers of a spirit, a superior being, not united with a body so organized as ours, or with one more perfect, adapted to him. Man can therefore not possess universal intelligence and sense, but only the understanding of a man ; not universal sensation, but only the sensation of a man ; not universal sagacity, but only the sagacity of a man ;
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not universal apprehension and judgment, but only the apprehension and judgment of a man ; not universal mechanical or mental power, but only the abilities of a man. To every being, suit only certain and no other properties, only certain and no other capacities, only certain and no other privileges and abilities, only a certain and no other mode of existence, of life, of happiness. As the lamb cannot have the strength of the lion, nor the mole the keen and far-piercing eye of the eagle, since the lamb is a lamb, and the mole is a mole ; or, since amongst the creatures of God there should be lambs and moles : so neither can man have the intellect or the strength of a superior being, able perhaps to scan the universe entire, and set whole worlds in motion, since man is man ; or, since amongst the innumerable works of God, mankind was also intended to be. And, were there no such creatures as we, were there only more perfect beings ; we should not exist, but other, more perfect creatures, in our place ; we therefore should not be at all. And what intelligent man, on calm reflection, could wish that this were the case ? — —

This one consideration, my pious hearers, will teach us to regard many things, which we call evils, in a different point of view, and shew us, that they are nothing but results of the necessary circumscription of our nature and our capacities ;

capacities; that they are things which cannot but be, if in the universe of God's creation there should be men, or beings capable of human perfection, and of enjoying human happiness. To this class belong unimputable ignorance, unavoidable error, natural infirmity, defect or declension of faculties. All these are undoubtedly imperfections; and if we chuse to call every imperfection an evil, then these are evils: but they are only imperfections and evils abstractedly considered, and not respecting us, who are, what as men we can and ought to be, and who, as men, cannot be any other. What right have we then to complain of this, or make it a reproach to divine goodness? —

Thou complainest, o man, thou deemest it an imperfection, an evil; thinkest belike that it militates with the goodness of thy creator, that in many respects thou art totally ignorant; that such numbers of objects in heaven and on earth, in the intellectual and in the material world, lie totally hid from thee; that of so many others thou canst only scan the surface, discover a few of their effects, but not dive into the interior of their essence, not investigate their elementary constituent parts, their powers, their mode of operation; not see their several combinations, and the links of their connection. Thou mightest indeed have been so constituted as to know all things, to comprehend all things, connect the
past

past with the future, forget nothing, survey all things at one single glance, and perceive in the clearest light what is at present impenetrable mystery to thee. But then must thou have had quite other organs of sense, a quite other body, a quite other mind; then must thou not have been a man. As a man, who is therefore a man, because he has such a body and no other, such and no other organs of sense, such and no other intellectual faculties; as such thou canst possess only a certain determinate proportion of sense, of understanding, of sagacity, of memory, and the like; and this proportion cannot extend so far, as to comprehend all things, to fathom all things, to retain all things. Therefore, either thou must be a man, and consequently be ignorant in very many particulars, or thou must not be at all. — —

Thou complainest farther, peremptorily considerest it as an evil, thinkest truly that it militates with the goodness of thy creator, that thou art apt so frequently to err in the very things which thou mayst know and understand, that thou makest so many false conclusions, and art so frequently obliged to alter thy opinion, to revoke thy judgment; thou wouldst at least proceed unimpeded on that path of science that lies open before thee, and not meet with so many checks, obscurities and embarrassments upon it. But even this imperfection, this evil, if thou resolve to give it that name, is a necessary effect of
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the limitation which makes thee a man. He who cannot survey all things, cannot discern much more than the surface of things, can only judge of particular parts of the whole, but not of their combination, must of necessity sometimes err, sometimes judge falsely, sometimes with partiality, and sometimes take appearance for reality. Either therefore thou must be a man, and consequently a fallible creature, a creature in many respects liable to mistake; or thou must not be at all. — — —

Thou complainest in fine, and deemest it probably an evil incompatible with the consummate goodness of thy maker, that thy faculties extend no further, that they are so speedily exhausted, that thou art wearied by every exertion of them, that the sphere of thy motion, thy activity, is so confined, that it is bounded by innumerable impediments in the material world. Thou wouldst therefore act entirely unimpeded, at thy good pleasure change the course of things, overturn mountains, new-model the globe, create worlds of thy own, and bring every wish to effect. But all this demands a quite different body from thine, a quite different intellect from thine, a quite different station from thine; and then wouldst thou not be a man: thou wouldst therefore not be at all, and couldst even not attempt, not achieve, not enjoy that little, which at present thou canst do and accomplish and enjoy. — — —

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Never forget then that thou art not an angel, that thou art a man ; that as such thou must have a certain limitation, and even this and no other limitation ; and that very many things which thou callest evils are nothing but the natural, unavoidable effects of that limitation. Be thankful then to God, the Supremely-bountiful, that he did not barely create superior beings, but also man ; thank him that thou art, that thou canst think, judge, operate, act, but do not fondly require, to think, to judge, to operate, to act otherwise than as a man ; and solace thyself in this, that, even as a man, not indeed at once, yet by little and little, thou canst and wilt be always enlarging the sphere of thy apprehension and of thy activity, and becoming by degrees what thou art not and canst not at present be.

The second proposition which may enable us to form a right judgment concerning the evils that are in the world, and to confirm our faith in the consummate goodness of our creator and father, is this : Many things that we call evils, and which in certain respects deserve that name, are nothing else than salutary cautions against far greater evils ; and which, were it not for them, we must necessarily undergo. — Thus bodily pain is positively a disagreeable sensation, an uneasy mode of existence ; it is in this consideration an evil ; and it would be ridiculous for us to deny it, by maintaining, with some eccentric persons

persons among the antients, that we may be as tranquil and happy under those sensations as without them, or that pain is not pain. But this is likewise certain, that pain is a caution against still greater evils, and that, considered on this side, it is, or may be, an advantage to us. — —

Thou hast, for example, o man, thou hast exceeded the bounds of moderation in eating and drinking. This of necessity must occasion disorder in thy body; it must beget in it a noxious and corrupted juice, destroy the equilibrium or the reciprocal action of its solids and fluids, give too strong a tension to the one, render the other too sluggish, and the like: and that is so unavoidable, so implicated in the nature of the human body, that we should not be the creatures we are, if it were not. — — Suppose now that those disorders occasioned thee no pain, no unpleasing sensation. What would the consequence be? They would remain lurking in thy body without thy knowledge, would be always growing greater and more various, would spread farther and farther, till at length they would wholly destroy thy health, and put an end to thy life. Now that they are accompanied with pain, thou art informed by that pain, that something is passing in thy body which is not congenial, that may be destructive to it; it warns thee of that destruction, it prompts thee to think on means for preventing its progress; thou usest those means, abstainest

abstainest from whatever it was that caused this disorder, appliest thyself to the rules of temperance, and thus thou remainest exempt from greater evils, thus thou recoverest thy health and thy faculties; and thus wilt thou no longer consider pain, however unpleasant it may be, absolutely as an evil, but as the warning voice of a friend, that indeed flatters thee not, yet means thee well, and is solicitous for thy interest and welfare.

So also is it with the disagreeable, the painful consequences by which wrath, voluptuousness, every ungoverned, violent passion is attended in our body. They are premonitions of still greater evils. They are powerful stimulants to become better and happier. What disorders, what ravages, would such passions create, not only in the man who is addicted to them, but likewise in other persons with whom he is connected, except he himself suffered under them, unless their impetuosity were checked by painful sensations, if we were not urged by them to guard against their first attacks! Long, long ago would all social comfort have been destroyed, and society itself have fallen to the ground, had we been destitute of such powerful suggestions and restraints. — —

Does pain then come upon thee, o man; hast thou the unpleasant idea of undermining decay in thy body: yet murmur not against the Most High;

High; doubt not of his goodness, at the very time when he is giving thee fresh indications of it. Much rather recognise in that very pain the voice of a father, warning his wandering son, by exposing him to those disagreeable sensations, not for the sake of making him suffer, but because it is the best, the only method of averting from him sufferings still more severe, and even of saving him from these lighter sorrows in future, if he will but hearken to his voice, and allow it to have its due effect. —

Indeed there are likewise pains endured by man, which concur to bring on the dissolution of his body, and which therefore cannot be considered as mere admonitions. But commonly these are owing to our inadvertence to former more gentle, more mild advertisements, and therefore are to be imputed to nothing but our own faulty and perverse behaviour; and we ought not to complain of injustice on account of evils we bring upon ourselves. Are there however some few cases of a man's meeting with such destructive pains without any default of his; they belong to those evils, without the possibility whereof we should be destitute of a thousand inestimable advantages, or which by exercising us in virtue are calculated to carry us nearer to spiritual perfection; a point of view in a two-fold manner important, from whence, at another opportunity, we shall contemplate natural

tural evils. At present we must make yet one more remark on those which are comprised under the denomination of pain.

What is true of corporeal pain, or such as arises from the state of the body, holds good likewise of mental pain, or such as originates solely in the ideas of the mind. Disgust, trouble, vexation, grief, shame, disappointment, remorse, is mental pain. They are certainly unpleasant, painful sensations that arise, on our seeing that we have mistaken the truth and have plunged into error, that we have engaged in foolish and prejudicial affairs, or have executed good undertakings badly. They are unpleasant, painful sensations that arise when a man, by or without his own default, fails in his designs, is forced to abandon his purposes, is wrong in his suppositions and his expectations; when a man has allowed himself to be over-reached by the cheat, duped by the flatterer, deceived by the false friend; when he loses the outward distinctions and emoluments in which he made the whole of his happiness to consist, or which he reckoned as an essential part of it; when a man renders himself and his character contemptible by easily avoidable follies and weaknesses. All these, and a hundred other things of similar nature, to a man of an apprehensive mind, may be no less and still more painful, than the indispositions and distempers that arise in his body. But even that
 pain,

pain, how deeply soever it may wound us, is not absolutely bad in itself. Even that pain is an admonition, a necessary, wholesome admonition, to beware of greater evils. Its tendency is, to make us careful in the investigation of truth; considerate in our conclusions and undertakings; circumspect in the choice of our friends and familiars, in the prosecution of our designs, in the application of the necessary subordinate means; attentive to the whole of our conduct, and even to our minutest actions; modest in our judgments and expectations; moderate and temperate in the enjoyment of our fortunes. Were it not for these painful sensations, we should be still adding error to error, one mis-carriage to another, be deceived by every plausible appearance, become the prey and the sport of every impostor, still go on, judging and acting with greater rashness and folly, still flattered by idle hopes, and never become prudent and wise.

When therefore thou perceivest, o man, that thou hast been mistaken, that thou hast drawn false conclusions, hast taken a wrong step, hast placed too great a confidence in thyself or others, and art deceived in thy expectations; dost thou feel ashamed, does it give thee pain, does it cause thee grief and vexation; yet complain not of these sensations, as of things absolutely bad in themselves, or which men, whom God loves,

ought not to meet with. No, they are the voice of sovereign wisdom and goodness, calling thee to stop short in thy errors, to extricate thyself from them, telling thee wherein thou art mistaken and of what thou art henceforward to beware; it is a special privilege of thy nature, that thou canst consider, bethink thyself better, observe the consequences of thy actions and the actions of other men, correct thy judgments, and alter and amend thy conduct. Do but examine at such times into the causes, the occasions of thy trouble, the grounds of thy disappointment or of thy confusion: so wilt thou assuredly learn wisdom from it; so will the sources of thy uneasiness and vexation become constantly fewer; so wilt thou always more safely pursue thy course, always more easily console thyself on the loss of externals, less frequently miss thy aims, always more clearly perceive the condescension and goodness of thy heavenly father, and so will even these evils become benefits to thee,

SERMON II.

Of the Evils that are in the World.

GOD, if thou requirest of us, as rational creatures, reflection and moderation of our sensibility in sufferings ; thou requirest with equal right of us, thy subjects and children, complete and absolute submission. What folly can be greater, what insolence more culpable, than to murmur against thee, the ruler of the world, than to arraign thee, the Holy and the Just, of severity and partiality ! To thee, the Eternal, the Almighty, heaven and earth are subject ; all nature reveres and obeys thy supreme behests. And shall not we, we who are dust and ashes, who are even as nothing before thee, shall not we submit to thee our creator and lord ! Shall not we, in all that happens to us, prostrate ourselves in adoration at the foot of thy eternal throne ; and, under a deep sense of thy majesty and our insignificance, exclaim : It is the Lord ;

let him do what seemeth him good ! Not our will, but thine be done ; for thy will alone is right ! — Yes, thy will is right. It is the will of the wisest, the most affectionate parent, in whose kingdom infinitely more good than evil prevails, who far more frequently leads us on pleasant and smooth, than on toilsome and perilous paths, and gives us much oftener to drink of the goblet of joy than the chalice of sorrow ! A father, who chastens and disciplines his children only from love, and who would love them far less, were he to spare them entirely from chastisements and trials ! No ; thou, All-gracious, hast no pleasure in our pains, in our tears and lamentations ! Thou never afflictest us, merely that we may suffer ! Thou never bereavest us of our comforts, to cause us trouble and grief ! Thou never shewest thy power and supremacy over us, merely to assert thy rights, and to cause us to feel our weakness and dependence ! That only the tyrant, the enemy of man can do ; not the God who is love itself ! No ; fain wouldst thou remove all suffering from us, fain wouldst thou give us to enjoy unmingled pleasure, if we were capable of it in our present state, or if it could consist with the wisest and best constitution of things ! — But sufferings are unavoidable, in a world where all is subject to inconstancy and change, to dissolution and death ; among mankind, whose

powers

powers are so limited, who are obnoxious to so many errors and failings, and dependent on so many outward things: among mankind, whose inclinations, exertions, passions so frequently traverse and defeat each other, and whose affairs and fortunes are yet so variously and intimately interwoven together! If it be folly to complain that we are men, or which is the same thing, that we belong to the actual system of things; it were certainly not less absurd impatiently to complain of sufferings which are the common lot of mankind. Teach us, then, o Father, complete submission to thy will; let our resignation be as entire as it is just; and grant that the meditations we are now to enter upon in that view may have their full effect. We ask it for the sake of Jesus Christ, our lord, who has taught and commanded us to say, when we pray unto thee: Our father; &c.

DEUTERONOMY XXXii. 4.

His work is perfect; for all his ways are judgment.

THE more evils there are, or are thought to be, in the world; the more important is it to judge rightly of them; the less indifferent ought we to be concerning whatever has a tendency to smooth or facilitate the way to that right judgment. Do we multiply or magnify those evils in our imagination; do we separate them from the manifold benefits whence they originate, and
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which again originate from them ; do we accustom ourselves to attend rather to the evil than to the good that subsists in the world : then shall we neither conceive justly of God, nor of the world, nor of ourselves ; neither love God with all our heart and with all our soul, nor enjoy our own existence and appointment, nor exult in the comforts of life, with truly christian good humour. The recollection of the past will produce in us regret ; the idea of the present, discontent and uneasiness ; the prospect of the future, disquietude and trouble. The thoughts of God will be dreadful to us, his works will seem defective, his ways unrighteous, his demands austere, his chastisements cruel ; duty and virtue will be irksome, the comforts and joys of life insipid, and life itself a burden. We shall regard this earth as the abode of sorrow, of pain, and misery ; and its rational inhabitants as creatures entirely devoted to distress. And how unjust would such a way of thinking render us towards God and man, how slothful to all goodness, how sensible to every adverse event, how dismayed at every danger ; how wicked and unhappy !

Guard yourselves, my dear friends, against this temper of mind, by adopting and cherishing those lessons of wisdom, which are calculated to secure you from it. Accustom yourselves to reflect coolly and impartially on what are called evils,

evils, and really are so, that you may learn to consider them in their conjunction with the faultless whole to which they belong, and to combine them with the sovereign goodness of God and our vocation to happiness. To facilitate to you these reflections, and to exercise you in them, is the design of my present discourse. May it be attained in us all to the praise of the divine goodness, and to the advancement of a pious joy in God and all his works and ordinances !

When we first took this subject in hand, my devout audience, a fortnight ago, we divided all the evils that are in the world into two classes or species, namely, into natural and moral. Of the former, I mean of natural evils, we discoursed at that time ; of the latter we shall now say something, and, if it please God, again in a subsequent discourse. For rightly judging of them, we have already learnt to regard two general propositions as true. The first was : Many things which we call evils, are merely the necessary consequences of the limitation of our nature and our faculties, which makes man what he is ; and he that complains of these evils, complains that he is a man, or, which is exactly the same thing, that he, and not another, more perfect being in his stead, is thus stationed in the world of God. Hereto belong ignorance, error, weakness, limited agency, in so far as they are grounded

grounded in the natural frame and the natural condition of man. The other was : Many things which we call evils, and which likewise, considered abstractedly, deserve that name, are nothing else than salutary warnings of far greater evils, which, were it not for them, we must inevitably undergo. Thus it is, as we then observed; with almost all corporeal pains, or such as originate in the state of the body, as well as with all mental pains, or such as derive their origin from the ideas of the mind. They make us feel in a disagreeable manner the indispositions and disorders which have arisen in our body, or in our outward condition, or in our system of thought ; but, were it not for this sensation, those indispositions and disorders would never be remedied, and would be attended with still more prejudicial consequences.

We shall now advance a step further, my devout hearers, and endeavour to elucidate three other propositions. The first is : Many things which we call evils, are means subservient to advantages that far outweigh them, or elementary conditions and settlements, without which we must forego those advantages. The second is : Many others are only the necessary occasions and incentives to the developement and exertion of our faculties. The third is : Others again are designed to promote our moral improvement, and to train us up in virtue.

I say.

I say first, that many things, which we call evils, are means subservient to advantages that far outweigh them, or elementary conditions and settlements, without which we must forego those advantages. Hereto belong the whole state of weakness and dependence of our infancy and childhood. That man, at his entrance into the world, should be so impotent and ever liable to so many accidents, that for so long a time he should neither be able to stand nor to go, nor to feed and defend himself without extraneous aid ; depend so long for his nourishment, his health, his pleasures, on the will and providence of his parents or guardians ; be so long under their correction and controul, and be denied the free use of his powers ; that he, the lord of the earth, should, in these respects, be so far inferior to the generality of brutes : how often have the discontented or the ungrateful complained ! How often have these topics been made the prime articles in the long catalogue of evils by which man is alleged to be encompassed and persecuted from the cradle to the grave ! But then is not the use of the understanding and reason, is not the intellectual perfection to which we are by these means raised, a benefit ? Is it not the greatest, the noblest prerogative of our nature ? But can man ever become intelligent and rational, unless he live in society with others, receive instruction from them,

them, and be closely connected with them? And would he live with them in society, in order, firmly compacted society, and allow himself to be tutored and instructed by them, if he had no need of them, if, like the inferior animals, he were presently independent on his parents, and were sufficient to himself for his support?—Therefore, thou must either, o thou who seest nothing but unqualified evil around thee, thou must either maintain, that man would have been happier to have remained a merely animal, than he at present can be as a rational creature; or thou must no longer allege that state of childish infirmity and dependance to be an evil, but confess it the best means of bringing the human creature to the use of his understanding and reason, and thereby of rendering him actually man.

The case is precisely the same with very many disagreeable, adverse, noxious impressions and effects, which outward objects make upon us, or upon our organs of sense. We are more or less sensible to heat and cold, to every change of weather, to every alteration of the atmosphere. One while we are oppressed by the scorching rays of the summer's sun, and then are shivering in the frost of the winter months. We see, we hear, we feel numberless external things that are displeasing or injurious to us. Every part and member and joint of our body,
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may very easily, and by various means, be dislocated, shattered, broken, lacerated, maimed, injured and rendered useless. All these accidents may cause us pain, and various other ailments. Were our sensitive organs less delicate, our senses more obtuse, our skin tougher and impenetrable, our bodies hard as iron; then indeed the greater part of these evils would not exist. But how much, how infinitely much, should we be losers thereby! What advantages, what over-balancing advantages, do we obtain from the admirable articulation, flexibility and sensibility of every part and member of our body! What curious operations and exquisite works can a man execute solely with his hand and his fingers? How far is he, thereby alone, exalted above even the most strong and sagacious of the brute creation! What surprising works of art can he bring to effect! And what diversity, what nice combinations and variations of the pleasures of sight, of hearing, of smell, of taste, of touch, by our organs of sense are we enabled to enjoy, of which we should not be capable, were they less tender and irritable! But, would we enjoy these advantages and pleasures; we must likewise be reconciled to those discomforts and evils: that which renders the one possible, renders possible the other also; the same wise and benign constitution of our body and its relation to outward objects makes us susceptible

ceptible of both ; and he who ~~should~~ require the one and yet not be liable ~~to~~ the other, would require incompatible things ; he would require that his senses ~~should~~ possess feeling to a certain degree, and yet not have that feeling to the same degree ; that his limbs should be pliable, his skin tender, and yet impassible ; that is, not pliable and not tender : that outward things should act upon him, and yet not act upon him. It is therefore absolutely undeniable, that many things which we call evils, are desirable means subservient to far over-balancing advantages, or are elementary conditions and settlements, without which we must forego these advantages. And who can affirm such things to be positive evils ?

Secondly, my pious hearers, many other things, which we reckon evils, are only necessary and salutary occasions and incentives to the developement and exertion of our powers. Man comes into the world without cloathing ; he must provide himself with it. He enters the lists as it were without either shield or weapons ; he must learn to invent, to adjust, to use them. He has many wants, and his wants are perpetually encreasing : nature does not immediately supply them ; she barely affords him the materials ; he must work them up, and adapt them to his use. His field bears thistles and thorns ; brings forth a bad or a short crop of provision ; he must cleanse

cleanse it from the weed, and render it more prolific and productive, by toilsome industry. And how often do blighting winds, noxious insects, dreadful inundations, defeat the purposes of his most assiduous labour ! He finds opposition and obstruction on every side, which he can neither overcome nor obviate without labour and pains. — He has a curiosity for knowledge which is insatiable, which he cannot totally, and not without the utmost exertion of his faculties, gratify. He must labour, if he will live ; labour, if he will procure cloathing and the conveniences of life ; labour, if he would defend himself from his enemies ; labour, if he would acquire the means of pleasure ; labour, if he would govern his lusts and passions ; labour, if he would allow them their fill. Every thing costs him more or less reflection, industry, toil, exertion. What evils, what plagues ! exclaim the dissatisfied.

But how ? Can that be sheer evil, absolutely evil ? How could man without those wants, that opposition, those dangers, that curiosity, without those powerful stimulants to invention, to industry, to diligence, to the exertion of his faculties, be and become that which as a rational creature he is intended to be and to become ? Let man bring his cloathing into the world with him, like the brutes ; set him in security against all dangers ; surround him with all that he wants for his support, and let him find it exactly when
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he wants it; deprive him of his inquisitiveness; let him meet with no hindrances and no opposition: and how far will you raise him above the brutal state? How much nearer will you bring him to the venerable image of a perfect man? Will he thus forsooth acquire a clear consciousness of himself, fully enjoy existence and life? Will he learn to think reasonably, to consider, to act with forecast, to look beyond the present, to form extensive plans, and to prosecute them with judgment and firmness? Will not almost all his mental faculties lie dormant? What shall awake them? What set them in motion, and keep them in action? Can we then call that which procures mankind all these advantages, unfolds and exercises his powers, conducts him to the ends of his being, renders him capable of a higher perfection and happiness, can we call that absolute evil? — —

No; many will probably reply, labour, the exertion of our powers, is good for man, is properly no evil; yet, that he should so frequently labour in vain, so often exert his abilities to no end, this is certainly however a real and enormous evil. But that notion too is false, my devout hearers. We never labour absolutely in vain, never exert our powers utterly for nought, even when we seem as it were to execute nothing by them, when as it were we bring nothing to effect without us, procure ourselves neither
bread,

bread, nor riches, nor honour, nor the satisfaction of doing good to others ; still we are always exercising our faculties, and by practice they become more strong and more perfect : and that is real, lasting profit. Take, for example, my present, or any other religious discourse. My view in it is of all things to become serviceable to you. That is the entire wish of my heart. I likewise hope, sometimes more and sometimes less assuredly, that I am so ; and whatever weakens that hope is unpleasant to me. But suppose, that none of you reap benefit from my discourse ; yet have I not totally laboured in vain. I have thereby exerted my mental faculties, exercised them by reflection, by practice made them more perfect ; and this degree of perfection, be it small or great, will abide with me for ever. — The same holds good of all that we do, when that which we do is just and proper, and we do it in a rational manner, with reflection and consideration. There are therefore very many things, which we account evils, that are nothing else but necessary and wholesome occasions and incitements, to the eduction, expansion and exertion of our powers.

No less certain is it thirdly, my devout hearers, that many things which we call evils, and which are so considered in themselves, are not only in general means and incentives to the development and exertion of our faculties, but are also
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in particular very much adapted to the furtherance of our moral improvement, and to discipline us in virtue. This discipline will be necessary even for men, who though not sinners are yet men, that is, creatures so and no otherwise constituted and limited, if they are to be gradually perfected. No limited creature can all at once attain to that degree of virtue, of which, considered abstractedly, and absolutely and according to the whole scope of its existence, it is capable of attaining. But is it gradually to become more and more virtuous, more and more expert in all goodness; then can this be no otherwise effected than by discipline. And to that discipline belong occasions and incentives, obstacles to be overcome, difficulties to be encountered; and those obstacles, those difficulties, seem to be evils, and also are evils when viewed in a certain light; as they cause us at first disagreeable sensations and unpleasant ideas. But which is better : To have those disagreeable sensations and ideas, and by them to become more perfect, or to be exempted from them, but still to remain at the lowest pitch of moral goodness?

And thus it is with a thousand things which we term evils. One honest man shall be forced, on account of his openly bearing testimony to the truth, to experience opposition and scorn, lose his posts and his dignities, be deprived of many advantages and comforts of life. But it

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was proper for him to love and revere truth, as truth, and to prefer the knowledge of it to his outward welfare; and when he has learnt this, when he has thus brought himself nearer to superior intelligences, and to the father of spirits, will he regard that loss as any real evil? — Another, though of a wise, prudent, temperate and affectionate demeanour, is obliged to suffer many disappointments, calamities, sicknesses; must submit to be often contradicted by fools; must be surrounded by persons of violent, implacable, discontented, uncomplying tempers; must meet with a hundred impediments in all that he undertakes. But it was necessary that he should make greater progress in meekness, in self-command, in patience, in fortitude, in acquiescence, in magnanimity; and if he attains to a more exalted degree in these generous dispositions, in these virtuous aptitudes, will any of those afflictions appear to him absolute evils? — Such an one is doomed to experience many misfortunes that are not of his own procuring, fall into many perils, see his best plans defeated, and as to anything of a future provision live in more than common uncertainty. But he was to be taught to trust in God, to acquiesce in the determinations of his providence, to submit to be guided wholly by him, to seek his happiness more within than without, to learn to comply with his circumstances, and to be satisfied

in all events ; and if he learn and practise this, how much will his mind have profited, what permanent felicity will he reap from it hereafter ! — — Another labours with unabated sincerity, with indefatigable zeal for the general good, and is repaid with ingratitude. But he was thus to learn to think and act more disinterestedly ; to love and do good, because it is good, and to be satisfied with the consciousness of his integrity and the good-pleasure of God : and if he learn this by it, will that ingratitude, however deeply it may have wounded him at first, be a real, a permanent evil to him ? —

In like manner, my pious hearers, one man, by the loss of his fortune, is to be preserved from the excesses of luxury, and be taught moderation, industry, and acquiescence ; another must suffer unmerited affronts, that he may not be vain and proud, and by vanity and pride be injurious to himself and to others : a third must submit to be bereaved of the person, the friend, the earthly comfort whereon his whole heart was set ; that his affections may take a better turn, that he may acquire a nobler, a more heavenly temper : a fourth must have more than once in his life been brought to the brink of the grave, and felt the horrors of approaching dissolution ; that he may be made conversant with the thoughts of death and its consequences, and thence become wiser and better. And what reflecting

flecting man will account things absolutely bad, which may and should have such effects, and in numberless cases actually have them, how disagreeable and painful soever in themselves they may be ?

No, no, God in his gracious wisdom knows it to be highly necessary to the human nature, by sufferings and trials to become more perfect. Therefore it was that he allowed so many unmerited and grievous sufferings to befall his son Jesus, who was ordained to be the grand exemplar of human perfection, caused him to meet with so much contradiction and opposition, and his whole life on earth to be one continued exercise of temperance, of self-denial, of sacrifice, of fortitude. Therefore he still allows so many righteous persons to struggle with misery, so many innocent to be persecuted and oppressed, not that they may suffer, not for causing them disagreeable and painful sensations, — how can God torment those whom he eminently loves ? — no, to bring them nearer to perfection, and to render them capable of a superior felicity ; and, if that be the consequence of their sufferings, the consequence of the evil that overtakes them, will they complain of those afflictions, still hold those evils for something at variance with the sovereign clemency of their God ?

Wouldst thou therefore, o man, thou who seemest to perceive so much evil on all sides,

learn to form proper estimates of those evils, and render them tolerable and easy to thee ; deeply imprint on thy heart, these lessons of wisdom, and constantly apply them to thy own situation and circumstances.

Occasionally revolve in thy mind the pleasures which thy organs of sense procure thee, enjoy them with consciousness, with consideration and with a cheerful heart, and set them against the disagreeable or painful sensations they sometimes create: so wilt thou presently find how far these are outweighed by those, and how much thou wouldst lose if thou wert deprived of the one on account of the other.

Consider the several wants for which thou must provide with labour, and at times with trouble, the various obstacles and difficulties which meet thee in whatever thou art purposed to do, all the works and affairs which demand exertion and industry, even all thy unsuccessful attempts and labours, all the wise and good actions which seem to thee to have been done in vain ; consider them all, as what they truly are, as means and excitements to unfold thy powers, to render thee more expert in the employment of them, to make thee rational and wise, and thereby to promote thy spiritual perfection, the only property which is indefeasibly thine, and remains for ever thine: so will most of the troubles and hardships of this
life

life assume a different aspect in thy eyes, and cease from being evils to thee. —

Lastly, never forget that without virtue no permanent felicity is to be had, and without discipline no human virtue, and that this discipline presupposes adversities and afflictions, and that therefore these adversities and afflictions are not absolutely bad, that they may be benefits to us, the means to further perfection. And if thou recognize this, and apprehend it with inward conviction, thou wilt no longer be oppressed with the burden of life, the multitude of real or imaginary evils will no more perplex thee; thou wilt no longer misdeem of God and his sovereign goodness, thou wilt love and revere him as the most tender and bountiful parent, be satisfied with all his provisions and dispensations, hold his will in all things the best, and say, with cordial sentiment, in the words of the prophet: His work is perfect: for all his ways are judgment!

SERMON III.

Of the Evils that are in the World.

GOD, with humility of heart we confess that the evils and afflictions we meet with in the world are means of discipline and amendment, and that in this view they should wear a different aspect to us from what they frequently do. They often rouse us from the most fatal slumber of indolence and security ; teach us to understand and to employ our faculties ; teach us to judge rightly of the value of things ; abate our dependance on what is earthly and visible ; refine and exalt our sentiments ; give our inclinations and endeavours a better turn ; make us attentive to our superior destination ; call us to seek more durable, permanent possessions, purer satisfactions, intrinsic spiritual perfection ; exercise us in temperance, in self-controul, in patience and fortitude, in general and brotherly affection, in obedience to thee our God, and
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a firm confidence in thy mercy ; render religion more important and soothing to us, and the hope of a better life after death the more precious. And if they teach us this, and effect this in us, how much must we be the gainers ! What benefits must even the severest afflictions become ! Yes, o Father, when thou chastenest us, it is to make us wiser and better, to exercise us in wisdom and virtue, and to discipline us for that superior life to which thou hast ordained us ! Oh let us never misconstrue thy gracious purpose ; let all our sufferings be blessed to that end ! — Yes, afflictions are means conducive to perfection ; methods of cleansing us from secret sins ; calls and incentives to extraordinary and signal acts of virtue, to truly christian heroism and really great achievements ! By the appointment of thy providence, suffering has ever been the path to honour. A path which all the eminently wise and good, all the chosen men of God have walked, and which they now confess to be the straitest, surest road to higher excellence ! A path that is marked by the footsteps of Jesus our captain and leader, and by which he entered into sovereign glory ! O God, let us never forget these soothing doctrines of reason and religion ! Let them be continually present to our minds, let them lighten to us the night of affliction, let them keep us from falling into the snares and dangers
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of that dark path of life, and uniformly have an influence on all our judgments, sentiments and actions ! Thus shall we suffer as long as thou callest us to suffer, but never sink beneath afflictions, - always venerating and loving thee, even under the pressure of sorrows, as the wisest and best of parents, and by sufferings progressively become wiser and better and happier ! In this view bestow thy blessing on our present meditations, and hear our prayer for thy mercy's sake in Jesus Christ, in whose name we present ourselves before the eternal throne, and in the words which he instructed us to use conclude our petitions, saying : Our father, &c.

DEUTERON. xxxii. 4.

His work is perfect ; for all his ways are judgment.

IN two foregoing discourses we have reflected on the natural evils that are in the world, my devout hearers, and endeavoured to get juster conceptions of their real quality, their purpose, and their connection with the divine goodness and with our felicity. These reflections have taught us, that many things which we call evils, and which in themselves considered are properly so called, are no more than the necessary consequences of the limitation which makes man to be what he is ; that others are salutary cautions against far greater evils ; that a third
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sort are indissolubly united to far over-balancing advantages and comforts, which we must otherwise forego; that a fourth class are occasions and incentives to the developement of our faculties and to the furtherance of our spiritual perfection; and that lastly a fifth order are means to our moral improvement and discipline in virtue. To these classes of things, which we term evils, we have particularly referred: the unimputable ignorance, the unavoidable errors, the circumscribed activity of man, the generality of his painful sensations, the disagreeable impression made by outward objects on his tender and delicate organs of sense, and the great irritability of his body, the state of weakness and dependency of our infancy and childhood, our various wants, toilsome labours and often apparently useless exertions of our powers, and lastly the manifold adversities and afflictions to which we are obnoxious.

To day, my pious hearers, we will conclude our reflections on natural evil by endeavouring to set three other propositions in their proper light. The first relates to those evils which are necessary and unavoidable consequences of the relative situations in which we are placed to outward objects and they to us. Another, to those which are the result of our own misconduct. The third and last relates particularly to death, which is so frequently represented as the greatest of evils.

I say first then that many things which we call evils, and which really are so in themselves considered, are no other than necessary and inevitable consequences of the relations wherein externals stand to us and we to them. These relations are various. The relations between mankind and the animals which inhabit this earth in common with us ; the relations between men and men, who together form but one society ; the relations between the different dwelling-places of mankind, and the greater or smaller advantages of their inhabitants ; the relations of the earth to the sun and the solar system, and the solar system to the immense universe to which it belongs. As numerous and diverse as those relations are, so numerous and diverse must be likewise the limitations of our condition resulting from them ; and if these limitations be absolute evils, then must we account that highest effect of divine goodness, the creation itself, an evil. —

The earth therefore is not constituted for us alone, but at the same time for an innumerable multiplicity of other creatures, seeing it is not adapted to our nourishment alone, but likewise to theirs, and because they have need of us, and we still greater need of them. But should indeed these creatures have less title to the goodness of the creator than we? Should he solely provide for us, and not for them? Or should

should almighty goodness produce our race alone, and not likewise all that is capable of life and happiness as well as we? If then at times we suffer detriment on account of these creatures, if they expose us to some dangers, at times destroy our work, or deprive us of some of the fruit of our industry; is not that the natural effect of the mutual relations that subsist between them and us? Are not they as well as we entitled to the enjoyment of the goods of this earth, the common foster-mother of us all; and do not the advantages and accommodations which they procure us very far exceed the injuries they do us? — —

As little and indeed still less can man as man exist alone. He must have associates, must have other creatures of his kind about him, stand in connection with them, take and have part in their fortunes, if he would not be corrupt, but become rational and happy. But dost thou act justly, dost thou judge reasonably, o man, when thou complainest of the discomfort and annoyance which at times ensue from these connections, as of evils thou oughtest not to meet with? Certainly thou shouldst serve others, if they should serve thee; help them, if they should help thee; bear their burden, if thou wouldst have them to alleviate thine; be indulgent to their failings and infirmities, if thou requirest them to overlook thy own. Certainly

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tainly thou shouldst at times give way to them, when their path crosses thine, and their wants are more urgent, or their pretensions more just, or their faculties stronger than thine. But that which thou art doing today for them, tomorrow they will do for thee; and if these reciprocal compensations do not in every particular occurrence obtain, yet they certainly do respecting the whole to which thou belongest. And shall this commutation of civilities, of services, of indulgence, be an evil? Go, try the experiment; withdraw thyself from them, renounce all fellowship with them, shut thyself up in solitude, be wholly independent, live entirely for thyself; and see whether thou wilt then be happier, whether thy life will not soon become a burden to thee. — —

We are lastly parts of one whole, of one immense aggregate. No part can of itself compose that whole: no part can at the same time fill more than one place in the order of things: no part can be positively that which the other is. One while must one forego something, and one while another; now must one, and now another, enjoy some advantage, if all should go well with the whole. Thus all men cannot inhabit the same climate of the earth. If thou livest in the temperate zone, another must inhabit the torrid, and a third the frigid zone; if moreover all who can live at the same time, should

should live: and surely to be and to live is infinitely better than not to be and not to live. If thy field be a real paradise, and enjoy the bland influences of the sky, then must the field of thy remoter brother, which cannot enjoy that advantage, even because it is so much remoter, be a desert, which he can only render fruitful by the utmost exertions of labour. — — —

The globe itself is but a part of the whole solar-system to which it belongs, and that solar-system is no more than a part of the immense universe. And therefore thy abode, the earth, can be only that and nothing else than that which it is; produce and nourish only these and no other plants and fruits and animals and men; be only so and no otherwise inhabited, cultivated, employed; only yield matter and occasion to such and no other occupations and pleasures; adapt itself only to such and no other, no finer and no grosser, organs of sense. Earth and water and air and fire, all is so, as befits us and the other inhabitants of the globe; and we are so, as creatures must be, for whom this fire, this air, this water, this earth, is designed; and the globe itself, its gravity, its magnitude, its distance from the fountain of light and heat, so as is fitting for the whole solar-system; and this system, so as is suited to the other innumerable hosts of solar and mundane systems. All things are linked together,

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all things stand in the most diversified relations and habitudes to each other, all together compose but a single whole.

And thou, o man, wilt lament that thou dost not alone compose this whole ; that this whole does not barely subsist for thee ; that thou art not at once this part and a thousand other parts of it beside ; that thou canst not enjoy all, cannot do all, and effect all, that is enjoyed, done and effected, in the whole immense creation ! The creation then should be a solitude, an uninhabited desert, only that thou mightest not be circumscribed ! Would justice or injustice, goodness or the want of goodness have place, if the Almighty gave life and with it the capacity of happiness, only to thee, and not likewise to all which may live and be or become happy besides thee ? And that he has done this, has thereby placed thee in such various relations as conduce to the good of the whole and to thy own, can it be an evil, can it be injustice ?

This, however, is not all. Consider, o man, (which is my second proposition) consider, that thou thyself art the author of the greater part and the painfulest of the evils that here befall thee, and that even the rest would be easier and more tolerable to thee, if thy conduct were wiser and better. Yes, thy follies and thy sins are what deprive thee of numerous real pleasures, which nature offers thee ; subject thee to

so much pain and misery, which thou art warned by nature to avoid; and frequently render thy life so bitter and burdensome, which agreeably to the ordination of nature, might be so peaceful and happy. Oh if thou didst but hearken to the voice of God and nature; wouldst but constantly consider what thou art, and what the men, thy brethren, are; if thou didst but regard them, thyself, and the other surrounding objects as what they are; if thou wert but to accustom thyself to scan the whole of thy life, the whole of thy destination: how many cares and troubles would be removed from thy heart! How many dangers, how many devious paths, wouldst thou avoid! How often with contentment and exultance wouldst thou pursue thy course, where now thou waterest it with tears! Would so many artificial wants condemn thee to toilsome and anxious labour? Would restless ambition allow thee to be satisfied neither with thyself nor with others, or would the insatiable thirst of gold torment thee? Would degrading excesses so frequently destroy thy health, rack thee with pain, or shorten thy life? Would envy and hatred and malice, rankle in thy soul like tormenting fiends, and convert thy heart into a nest of scorpions? Would every opposition, every impediment, every miscarriage, every disappointment, make thy courage fail? Would vanity and pride, caprice and self-interest, haughtiness

tininess and ill-humour, so often embitter thy life, and render burdensome the society of thy brethren, which should yield thee satisfaction and delight? — Accuse not thy maker, o man, accuse only thyself, that to the few unavoidable evils that are in the world, thou addest so many others, which thou couldst so easily avoid if thou only wouldst. Be wise, o man, be moderate; follow nature; think and act conformably to the ends of thy being; require not to be that which thou canst not be; and be that, but be so entirely and constantly, which thou oughtest to be; and thy plagues will instantly diminish, thy joys will increase and multiply from day to day, and no unmerited evil will oppress thee, no one will be unattended with good and wholesome effects.

In conclusion, my devout hearers, and this is my third and last proposition, even death itself is not that enormous evil for which it is so often taken. Of all natural evils, death indeed is that which is regarded and described as the greatest and most dreadful. The object itself, and still more the circumstances and possible consequences of it, are in reality terrible. To lose all our goods and possessions for ever; to bid adieu to every comfort of life; to be torn from our friends, to resign our body to the grave and to corruption, and though not altogether, yet in the present mode to cease to be: must certainly

tainly excite very unpleasant ideas and feelings, must fill a man with consternation and horror; is what he must hold an evil, must hold the greatest of all evils, if he had no compensation to expect for that loss, if he had no reason to consider that evil as a means to higher perfection. But even here our calm reflections furnish us with various considerations which teach us to judge more justly of the matter.

Nothing is more certain than that the human body, such as it is, cannot continue for ever, that the principles of dissolution lie scattered in its original constitution, in its natural frame and texture; that its powers necessarily exhaust by degrees, its members become less supple and at length inflexible, many of the smaller and larger vessels close up, many of the soft parts harden, the irritability and force of the heart relax, and at length must cease. To require the reverse, implies to require a different body; and to wish this, is to wish for a different abode, other means of nourishment, a different earth, a different atmosphere, a different sun, and different relations and fitnesses to external things; and if all these were different, should we still be men, still be the creatures that we are? And is this anything else than contending with our creator, and chusing rather not to be at all, than to be as we are? —

I am well aware, that sin produces disorders and devastations in the human body, that it renders the passage from the present into a superior state harder and more painful to man; that it has abridged the term of his life; and that death, in this respect, with all the terrifying circumstances with which it is now accompanied, is the wages of sin. But transitory and frail must still the terrestrial human body ever be, that draws its nourishment from this earth, and is adapted to this terrestrial abode; and neither reason nor scripture will allow me to believe that man was ever ordained to remain constantly on this globe, or to pass over into a superior state without putting off and transmuting this earthly tabernacle. This alteration of our state, which we denominate death, is therefore one way or another in the nature of our body, or arises from our being men, and because not a higher class of beings has taken our place in the empire of God. — —

Indeed this consideration alone would not yet deprive death of its terrors. Indeed, if our whole existence were to terminate with it, it would be always a dreadful calamity, it would be the greatest of evils. But learn to account it only what it actually is, o man; consider it as the way to higher perfection; so wilt thou acknowledge it to be, not something absolutely ill; thou wilt confess it to be the means for putting

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ting thee in possession of better goods. And this in fact it is: neither reason nor scripture will allow us to doubt of it. It is not the cessation, but the alteration of thy existence; not the end, but the more perfect continuation of thy life; not the loss of all that thou art and hast, but only the loss of externals, which, if thou hast rightly employed them, have promoted thy intrinsic, spiritual, permanent perfection, unfolded thy powers to a certain degree, and rendered thee capable of a nobler application of them, and which then in thy future state can be of no farther service to thee. Wouldst thou be more perfect, wouldst thou be happier, than here thou art and canst become; then must thou necessarily undergo that change, be placed in other relative situations to the intellectual and the material world; thy sphere of operation must be enlarged, thou must have assigned thee higher occupations and loftier pleasures, of which thou wert not capable here, and for which thy present condition and the present frame of thy body and thy connections with external objects, must prepare thee. And shall this passage to perfection be an evil to thee? —

Or is it merely the kind and manner of thy death, that thou deemest so tremendous an evil? But if death itself be the passage to a higher, a better state; then cannot the kind

and manner of it be absolutely ~~ble~~. — Whether my faculties will gradually wear out, or be consumed on the bed of sickness; or whether I die by an earthquake, in water, or in fire; — the way is different, but the end is the same: the way sometimes more and at others less terrific, the end is always good, — superior, permanent perfection. And the God, by whom I am and live, knows how to preserve and to preserve uninjured that which is immortal in me, just as well in the depths of the earth, in the water and the fire, as in the apparently more regular and methodical repository of the grave.

Or thinkest thou so sensually, so meanly, o man, that thou couldst be heartily content with remaining eternally here, be satisfied with the point of force and weakness, with the proportion of sorrows and joys, with the degree of knowledge and virtue thou hast at present, with the contracted circle thou hast already so often reiterated, of businesses and pleasures? Oh then I pity thee as a creature forgetful both of his origin and his destination, that has done violence to himself and suppressed all generous, honourable sentiment and imagination, that has divested himself of the especial privilege of humanity, the incessant effort after higher perfection, and is preparing for himself sorrows instead of joys in the future state into which he has still to pass, and which might have been so desirable, so delightful to him.

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No; my ambition is greater, my aim more exalted, my desires and endeavours more extensive. My present condition is indeed not burdensome to me; I revere the wisdom and goodness of my creator in the constitution and allotment of it: but I feel that I may be and become still more than I at present am, and thereto will death prepare my way, by him shall I get at once a great stride nearer to the prize I run for; and shall I account this means of becoming more perfect and happy, something absolutely bad, the greatest of evils? No; even this is good, even this is gain, is a benefit to me, that I must die, and even in death will I praise the goodness of my creator and father.

And now, o man, o christian,* thou who hast attentively heard the foregoing considerations, hast perceived and felt their truth, recall them to thy memory, combine them together in thy reflections; and if thou feel their persuasive energy, leave off complaining of the multitude and enormity of the natural evils that are in the world. Presume no longer to charge the God who is love itself with any want of affection. No, no, from him, the Supremely-bountiful, nothing absolutely ill can proceed; under his government must everything that is bad, or appears to be so, be productive of good. He knows how to bring light out of darkness; brings it infallibly forth; and even that darkness would
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not be, if we were capable of the day-light without a previous dawn. —

Be therefore constantly persuaded, that an intelligent agent without limitation would not be a man: that tolerable cautionary pain is preferable to unavoidable and total destruction; that a sensitive body, on which externals make far more agreeable than disagreeable impressions, is much more desirable than a body which though no disagreeable impressions could affect, yet must be utterly insensible to all that are agreeable: that, whatever renders us intelligent, reasonable agents, unfolds and invigorates our powers, and enlarges our sphere of action, is not evil, is conducive to perfection: that, what makes us morally better, and exercises us in virtue, is medicinal and salutary, is beneficial to us, however unpleasant and noxious it may seem to us at first: that a part cannot be the whole, that man cannot be the sole creature of God, the world cannot be the universe: that relative positions are limitations, and these are as diversified and inevitable as those: that the imprudent, the foolish behaviour of man heaps far more and far greater evils upon him, than all nature in itself contains; and even these would not sit half so heavy on him, if he were wiser and better: that death itself is not destructive evil; it is the passage into another state, the process to superior perfection.

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These lessons of wisdom forget not, o man ; imprint them deeply on thy heart : so will the generality of evils cease to be evils in thy sight ; so wilt thou find nothing, nothing absolutely bad in the universe of God, in his works and disposals ; so wilt thou clearly apprehend the great-superabundance of good to evil, rejoice in thy existence and the goodness of thy creator, be satisfied with thy present condition, be always making thyself fitter for thy future superior vocation, and exclaim with inward conviction : God is excellent in power and in judgment and in plenty of justice ; he will not afflict. He has done all things well ; his work is perfect. O magnify the Lord with me, and let us praise his name together.

SERMON IV.

Of the Evils that are in the World.

GOD, omniscient, almighty, supremely bountiful God, thy divine intelligence comprehends and surveys all; thy energy animates all; thy goodness embraces all with the most active benevolence. All clearly appears to thee according to its various relations and powers and effects, according to its entire destination, according to what it now is and will be throughout all future ages. Cause and effect, design and execution, capacity and the use of capacity, reasons and results, sins and deliverance from sins, misery and bliss, death and life, time and eternity are ever present at once to thee. Accordingly thou judgest of all by truth, orderest and guidest all with consummate wisdom and goodness, and lookest with complacency on the whole of thy immense creation.—We, Lord, we can only see, but not see through, what is immediately before our eyes; only particular, abrupt, inconsiderably little parts of the whole; beginning

ning and end and consistence are concealed from us. But all that we see and understand, all that we know of thee from thy works and from thy word, informs us, that thou art the Only-wise, the Supremely-bountiful, the Holy and the Just, that thou art essential love. Lord, we adore thee in the deepest humility and with filial confidence. Yes, thy works must all be blameless, thy ways unimpeachable; all that thou orderest and dost must be just and expedient. Even from darkness thou producest light, and from evil good. Even to sinners thou shewest grace and mercy, and where all seems confusion and misery there lie already prepared the grounds and means of order and felicity. God of our lives, grant that we may constantly recognize this consoling truth, embrace it with firm belief, that we may uniformly love thee as our kindest parent, and steadfastly believing in thee find peace and happiness. Bless to the confirmation of that faith the reflections thereupon that we now design to make. Cause them to diffuse a radiant light over our minds and excite confidence and joy in our hearts. For all this we pray thee in the name of Jesus Christ, our saviour, who has taught us to address thee thus : Our father, &c.

DEUTERONOMY XXXii. 4.

His work is perfect : for all his ways are judgment.

WE have divided the evils that are in the world, or among mankind, into two classes, my devout hearers ; into natural or physical, and moral. On the former, or natural evils, we have offered various considerations, sufficient to convince us, that those evils are not what they are commonly taken to be, and that they neither militate against the sovereign goodness of God, nor against our real perfection and happiness.— We will now discourse of moral evils ; and as these are so combined with the former, it must already appear, that the case is the same with the one and the other, that the works and ordinances of God are irreproachable respecting both, and that all he does and permits is just and fit.

At the same time I readily admit, that I have not pursued my reflections nor now discourse to you on these with the same assurance of finding sufficient light and complete satisfaction, as I had in the former. I immediately ~~decried~~ difficulties before me, which I had the less hope of being able to solve, as the solution of them ~~has~~ already been so often attempted in vain. And these difficulties do actually subsist, — are probably in our present state insolvable to all
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men and for ever. But any anxiety or uneasiness in these reflections I have not felt. My faith in the consummate goodness of God is not at all shaken by them ; his eternally constant, his eternally effective love to mankind, is to me no matter of doubt ; their future contingences and the junctures and circumstances of their affairs, are not become a perplexing mystery to me. The oftener I think on him the All-bountiful, the more reason I find for calmly and confidently leaving to him the disposal of my lot and that of all my brethren, and to expect constantly what is best both for them and for myself. — And though the light that enlightens us on these points be but dim — no more than twilight ; still it is light and not darkness ; and if by its faint gleam we cannot survey all things, cannot find our way out of every labyrinth, yet we may distinguish many objects, avoid many devious paths, and see enough to keep us aloof from the abysses of doubt and the pool of despondence.

Accordingly we will avail ourselves of this light, my devout hearers. If it do not lead us to all truth, yet it discovers to us the traces of many a truth. If it do not enable us to unravel all difficulties, still it enables us to diminish their number, and allows us sooner or later to hope for the disentanglement of the rest. In this view we will now impart to you a few observations,

servations, which may contribute somewhat to the forming a correcter judgment of the moral evil that is in the world.

By moral evil we mean the disorders which error and vice have occasioned in man, his bad propensities and passions, his iniquitous, lawless behaviour, and the pernicious, ruinous consequences which all these bring upon himself and upon others. This evil is undoubtedly manifold and great. Error and vice have the ascendant among mankind, exercise over many of them an unlimited sway, and none of all can aver, that he has never sinned. What sins, what crimes, what enormities, have been perpetrated by mankind! By what vile lusts, by what corrupt passions, do they allow themselves to be enthralled! And what ruin, what devastation, are occasioned by those sins, those crimes, those lusts and passions, both in domestic and civil society! What scourges do they often bring on whole countries and states! How can this evil, the reality of which no man can deny, under which every one more or less suffers; consist with the consummate goodness of God, the creator of men? Might he not have prevented it, might he not have totally banished sin, that greatest of all evils, from his empire, and thereby have rendered it impossible for the miseries that flow from it to arise? To the answering of these questions, several important observations occur.

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The first is : God has permitted this evil ; therefore, taken in the whole, far more good must result from it than harm : because God is, and cannot be otherwise than supremely wise and supremely good. This single proposition suffices to my consolation ; and the reason of it is to me as certain as the existence of God is certain to me. For, to believe a God, and not attribute to him consummate wisdom and consummate goodness, is a manifest contradiction. A being that is omniscient and almighty, — and that the creator of the world must necessarily be, — a being that is omniscient and almighty, cannot act otherwise than wisely and righteously, or, which is exactly the same thing, beneficently. Defect of understanding and judgment, presupposes ignorance, or defective knowledge ; and defect of goodness, implies error and a sense of weakness. Neither of them can possibly be conceived of the supreme being, of God. Him no error can mislead, he can propose to himself no views which cannot be attained or cannot be so attained as he had proposed to himself. Him no error can mislead ; he cannot represent to himself anything otherwise than it actually is ; no error and no sense of weakness can seduce him to oppress others, to injure them, to revenge himself on them, to make them the ministers of his vengeance, or to abandon them to their weakness and folly, to
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their own fatality, not to give them the good of which they are susceptible, to deprive them of it without cause, or in any respect to ordain and to do what is not right and fit. In short, absolutely perfect understanding and absolutely perfect might cannot be conceived abstractedly from absolutely perfect wisdom and absolutely perfect goodness. But, if God be perfectly wise and perfectly good, and has permitted the sin, the moral evil that is in the world, has not prevented it by his might : then must he necessarily have foreseen, that in the whole range of ages and worlds, infinitely more good than ill, infinitely more happiness than misery, is resulting from it ; that this real or apparent imperfection, ultimately tends to the utmost perfection of the whole ;—that, from this dissonance in the creation, the completest harmony would at length arise, and then his sovereign goodness be recognized and felt and praised by all that is and lives. And shall not that suffice to my consolation, although I cannot discover the proximate cause of it, and scan the immense combination of this whole ? No, no, from him, the Supremely wise, the Supremely good, I have nothing unjust, nothing unreasonable, nothing severe, nothing cruel, to dread. Though his ways be involved in ever so much darkness, in ever so intricate perplexity to me ; truth and goodness must characterise them all.

We need not however be definitively satisfied with these general considerations. We may advance yet a few steps farther. We can at least discover something of the motives and views of God in the permission of ill, and of the good that arises from it; and this also will clear the way for us to a more adequate apprehension of it.

I proceed therefore to a second remark, which is this: As the generality of physical evils derive their origin from the limitation of the human capacities and powers; so likewise is moral evil, in general, a natural consequence of that limitation which causes man to be what he is.— That precisely which renders us capable of so great, such still increasing virtue and perfection, is that which also renders us capable of error, of vice, of immorality.— The brutes can make no foolish, but likewise no prudent election; they cannot sin, but neither are they capable of moral agency; can do no ill, but likewise no good; cannot be vicious, but are in like manner incapable of virtue; they cannot degrade themselves, but neither can they soar aloft to sublimer objects. — Man can do both: and is not that a vast prerogative possessed by him above the irrational animals? Error as well as the apprehension of truth implies understanding, foolish as well as wise election, supposes consideration and liberty; morally bad actions as well as morally good, imply physical power and
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the free application of it; the lowest sensual lust, as well as the noblest, purest love, implies effort to enlarge our sphere of operation, to higher perfection. As the one, the apprehension of truth, the prudent choice, the morally good action, the generous and refined love, subsists in such bounded creatures as we are; so likewise must the other, error, the foolish choice, the morally bad action, the low sensual lust, have place. He that is to walk and run, and yet possesses only a determinate portion of strength, and meets with impediments in his course, must likewise be capable of stumbling and falling; and he who will be secure from the possibility of stumbling and falling, must not require to walk or to run. He that will see, and yet has and can have only limited optics, must be liable to see wrong, obscurely and partially, and he that will absolutely be exempt from this, must shut his eyes and renounce all vision.

Just so it is with man and his moral powers, with his capacity to act morally or immorally. — Is he to reflect, with his bounded reasoning faculty, upon truth and error, upon specious appearance and reality, and discriminate them from each other; he must be liable to confound them together, to take one for the other, to accept error for truth, and appearance for reality. — Is he to chuse between good and bad; between better and best; he must compare them
both

both together and both with his present and future state: and, since he cannot have the idea of them all at once, nor all in the same luminous point of view: it must be possible for him to err in his choice, to prefer the bad to the good, the better to the best, that his comparison between the two should be imperfect and fallacious. — — Is he to be capable of love, without which there can be no happiness for him; then, with his limited imagination, and with the vivid impressions which external objects make upon him, it must be possible that this love should not constantly be directed to the worthiest, that it should sometimes light on unworthy, little, low objects; and since his sensibility, his capacity to love, is at the same time nothing less than uncircumscribed; it must likewise be possible, that some one inordinate passion should entirely engross his heart, that it should hinder him from loving other far better and more amiable objects, that he should be indifferent and inattentive to them, despise them, shun and even abhor them. — In short, is man to be free; that is, able to act from the perceptions and ideas of his mind; and may his perceptions and ideas by reason of their limitation be erroneous and false: then must it also be possible for him, to follow those erroneous and false ideas, and therefore to act unjustly, unreasonably, wickedly, atrociously.

The reason of the possibility of ill, is the reason of the possibility of good ; and he that would deprive man of the former, must divest him also of the latter, or he would have man not to be man, he requires inconsistencies. — The question, Wherefore has God permitted moral evil, or sin ? is therefore in reality the same as the question, Wherefore has God produced man, and not another creature in his place ? or, Wherefore do we exist, since we cannot at the same time not exist ? And so long as existence is infinitely preferable to non-existence, no reflecting man will ever complain of having been called into being ; and so long as this renders us capable of any degree of happiness, he will never charge the creator with want of goodness for not making us capable of that higher degree of happiness whereof beings of a different kind are capable.

Third remark : Little as physical evils are absolute evils, or without all good consequences and effects, so little also are moral. These equally occasion and promote an infinity of real perfection and happiness ; and the preponderancy of the good over the bad is here as certain and as great as there. —

Where is the man, the profligate, who has absolutely nothing good, nothing estimable, nothing serviceable in him ; who is absolutely destitute of all capacity for being wise and virtuous ;

tuous ; in whose mind not one good, one just sentiment, in whose heart not one kind, one humane emotion will arise ; who never applies his mechanical and intellectual powers to any useful occupation or purpose ; who has never afforded any service to society, either mediately or immediately, either with or against his consent ; and therefore must be considered absolutely as a being in its very nature set awry, as a perfectly useless, an utterly noxious excrescence of creation ?

What abilities, what activity, on the other hand, are frequently discovered in the iniquities and crimes of man ! And what capacities, what powers, do they call forth and excite without him ! This all inordinate, malignant passions do ; and the further they extend in operation, the greater and more violent the concussions they spread around them, so much more force and agency do they excite in a thousand and a thousand human minds ; and if on one side death and desolation rage, so on the other new life and new efficacy arise. Take for example the vindictive, the ambitious, the unjust warrior, the conqueror, nay even the tyrant. What springs of the human heart are here set in motion ! What new, wide ranging schemes of thought and speculation, what vast plans and prospects that expand the mind, what various combinations of means and ends, what exertion of intellectual

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and mechanical powers, what exercises of reflection, of forecast, of courage, of fortitude, of self-command, of abstinence, of taciturnity, what collision of workings and counter-workings, are produced throughout the larger or smaller sphere wherein those passions reign? And shall this, with regard to the consequences, be something absolutely ill? The criminal, the profligate, who has nothing less in view than to promote perfection, who is solely intent upon depredation and the gratification of his own selfish passions, acts indeed wickedly; he debases, disgraces himself, and prepares for himself the most painful sufferings, the most righteous punishments. But expansion, exhibition, exertion of human power, is good, is progress to perfection; and this natural good is always, more or less, a consequence of moral ill. Physical perfection is withal the foundation of, has a natural tendency to moral perfection: what therefore advances the one, advances also the other.

Nay, moral evil must be more immediately subservient to the promotion of virtue. Among men, who by reason of their limited nature, cannot otherwise become good and be confirmed in goodness than by practice, the commixture and the conflict of good and ill, the struggles between virtue and vice, taken in the whole, must be extremely advantageous to virtue. The more
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continued and powerful the opposition, so much more honourable the masculine fortitude that overcomes it : the more violent the provocations of the irascible man, so much more dignified the meekness that is not exasperated at them : the greater the injuries, so much more divine the reconcilment and forgiveness ; the heavier the outward thralldom, the more exalted the unconquerable freedom of the mind : the more grating the ingratitude, so much the purer the unwearied beneficence ; the more considerable the loss for the sake of truth and justice, so much more warranted the unalterable love to both : the stronger and more alluring the temptations to sin, so much more glorious the conquest. By opposition, by danger, by impediments and difficulties, by sufferings and losses, by enemies and persecutors, human virtue is to be exercised, confirmed, purified, and brought by degrees to that fortitude which rises superior to all abatement or change. And to this must even the moral evil that is in the world contribute in an uncommon degree, however pernicious and criminal in itself.

And how often is it medicinal in this respect even to the wicked, to the vicious, for their correction ? How often is the personal experiment of good and ill, and their different consequences, the best, nay the only means, of bringing sensual, thoughtless persons to reflection,

flection, of making them circumspect and discreet, of rendering sin detestable to them, and of guarding them against all further relapses? If there be a select few who have heartily fixed their affection on virtue, before they were even acquainted with vice, who remain free from voluntary sins, and have taken warning solely from the example of others; yet there are far greater numbers who have first eaten of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and then felt the noxious, the painful consequences of the enjoyed fruit, are ashamed of their error, perceive the deceitfulness of sin, learn to abhor it, and hold up their former lamentable experience as an impenetrable shield against the allurements of fresh temptations; and likewise for these even moral evil is by no means absolute evil; it has admonished them, confirmed them in goodness, has been medicine to them for producing a permanent recovery.

Consider at the same time, my pious hearers — and for this solution we stand indebted to the christian revelation alone, which affords us even here the clearest light, and without which we could never have advanced so far in our reflections on God and man — consider therefore fourthly the wise, the gracious provisions, which God has made by his son Jesus, for the recovery of mankind, and for obviating the mischief occasioned by sin. Great the evil: as great the remedy.

remedy. Here sin; there deliverance from sin. Here universal mortality; there universal immortality. Here a man by whom sin and death came upon all; there a man by whom righteousness and life came upon all. — As in Adam all die, so all in Christ are made alive: that as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life, by Jesus Christ our lord. He, this great deliverer and saviour, should and will put all our enemies, all the enemies of human happiness, sin, death, the grave, under his feet, totally exterminate them, and then deliver up his kingdom, as a kingdom where pure truth, tried and confirmed virtue, unalterable happiness prevail, to God, his father and ours, who is and for ever will be all in all. — Indeed, an evil which could not be entirely remedied, which would constantly remain evil in all its consequences and effects, that would supreme, almighty goodness never have permitted; never would dissonance have arisen in the creation of the Omniscient, were it constantly to remain dissonance, and never dissolve into harmony. But evil, to the removal and extirpation whereof, even before it actually was, the most powerful means were prepared; evil, which might and would become harmless and at length salutary, to permit this is the work of omniscient goodness, which comprehends the whole of things and surveys it at one view.

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And then, my pious hearers, elevate your thoughts into the future world, of which, thanks to christianity, we have the most infallible assurance, and so many juster conceptions than the philosophers of antiquity had ; elevate yourselves, I say, into the future world, which alone can completely solve the knotty points that now employ our thoughts, and which will certainly hereafter unravel all, and convince us that all is just and expedient. The present state of man is not his whole appointment, is only the commencement of his life and the infinite process of the expansion of his powers. Eternity can compensate, supply, beautify and regulate all. No faculty, no capacity, can be totally lost in the universe of God ; nothing good, though no more than physical good, will be unserviceable for ever, or not draw after it other consequences as good. — Indeed punishments, just, severe punishments await the obstinate sinner ; and woe to him, whom the idea of these punishments does not deter from sin ! He will suffer what is due to his deeds, suffer more, suffer more horribly, than he can at present conceive in the gloomiest hours of his life. But even these sufferings, these punishments, are ordained by the Supremely Good, who inflicts suffering on no one for the sake of making him suffer, but for producing good thereby. Sooner or later will God manifest himself as love to his whole creation.

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Eternity, — which in thought to us is still rather a word than an idea, — eternity comprehends all ; but we cannot comprehend it with our intellect. It unravels all ; but how, we, mortals, cannot conceive. It leads and brings all to the goal ; but when and whereby, is concealed from us. From everlasting to everlasting, from one great revolution of this or some different solar and mundane system to another, what vicissitudes may not the living and sensitive beings belonging to it undergo ! What means for bringing light out of darkness, for producing good, infinite good, through ill, does it not contain ! What results does it not allow to be expected by reflecting minds ! — And shall that which is now disorder, or appears to be so ; shall that be eternal, or appear to be so ? Shall it never evolve into the most beautiful, the most perfect order ? And if it ever happen, though according to our mode of measuring time, never so late, after the lapse of never so many ages and epochas of eternity ; what will the present momentary darkness and apparent disorder be to the light and harmony, this instant of suffering to the joy and bliss, that will then continue from one period of eternity to another, as eternal as God ?

After all this, do any difficulties, my devout hearers, still remain, which we have not completely solved, any points which we cannot
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compare and reconcile ; yet surely this need not perplex our minds. We plainly perceive how all physical or natural evil is effect and predisposition of divine wisdom and goodness ; we plainly perceive, how, in many respects, it is and may be the occasion of moral : and if now this evil still presents a dark side to our view, is it not reasonable that we should seek the cause of that obscurity rather in our visive faculty, than in the object ? Shall we, we who must confess all the works of the Lord, which we competently understand, to be perfect and incapable of amendment, shall we not trust, that likewise all the rest, which we cannot fully scan, are equally complete and perfect ?

Recognize then, my pious hearers, recognize and revere the consummate wisdom and goodness of God, even in the permission of moral evil. Doubt not that, sooner or later, out of it will arise the greatest possible good ; that at length, from the tumult of inordinate human passions, from the manifold obstinate conflicts between truth and error, virtue and vice, from the apparently strange effects and destinies of both, so much light, order, beauty, felicity, will arise as without the present constitution of things could never have obtained. This may and should be as certain to you, as certain as you believe a God, a first, eternal cause of all.

Beware

Beware only of sin. Sin is unquestionably the greatest of all evils, the only real evil, the only one that can render you truly unhappy, and injure you for ever. Have you vanquished that disturber of human contentment and joy, that foe to your happiness; are you, through Jesus, become free from its dominion? Oh, then nothing will or can harm you; then nothing will or can be dreadful to you, nothing fill you with consternation and dismay. Evil and good, sorrows and joys, the present and the future, heaven and earth, God and the world, all are yours; all serve and work to your true interest, all must and will promote your perfection and happiness; all eternally co-operate to evince the truth, that God is love.

SERMON V.

The Coming of the Kingdom of God.

GOD, thou reignest over all, and thou governest all by the wisest laws, the hosts of heaven as well as the inhabitants of the dust, the most exalted spirits as well as the whole inanimate creation, all are subject to thee, all are means and instruments to the prosecution of thy infinite designs; for all things are and subsist by thee, all are thy creatures, the work of thy hands. Likewise over human beings, likewise over us thou rulest with consummate wisdom and benignity. Thou hast formed us intelligent and free agents, and elevated us to the rank and to the honour of thy rational, thy moral subjects. And how happy is our condition! How great the privileges that grace us in this respect beyond so many of our brethren! What light, what intellectual energies, what comfort, what means of improvement hast thou vouchsafed us through thy son Jesus! Yes, by him whom thou hast given us to be our instructor
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and guide, our lord and king, by him thy kingdom came on earth, by him its borders were considerably enlarged, its authority was confirmed, its efficacy augmented; and we too enjoy the privileges and immunities of it. And how mild, how amiable is the dominion which thou exercisest over us by this thy great vicerent! How contented, how cheerful, how happy is the christian, who is entirely such in thought and deed! Oh might it be granted us daily more and more to apprehend and feel the felicity of being subjects of the kingdom of Jesus, and of being governed and ruled by him, the wisest and kindest master, and of constantly rendering ourselves worthier of that happiness by the whole tenour of our conduct! Might that glorious, that blessed kingdom, the kingdom of truth, of virtue, of liberty, of happiness, be everywhere, both among such as are and such as are not christians, still farther amplified and increased, still more firmly established, always bringing mankind nearer to their grand and final destination and appointment! Might every one of us, in the place and in the sphere, which thou hast assigned him, contribute all that he possibly can to the advancement of that kingdom and the happiness that is so strictly allied to it, among his near and remoter brethren! Yes, thy kingdom come, o God; come among us and all thy children upon earth! May it now come, while

while we are employing ourselves in serious meditations upon it. Oh grant that light may be diffused into our minds, and inclination and energy to good into our hearts ! For this we implore thee, as the votaries of thy son Jesus, with filial confidence, and address thee further in his name, and in the form which he prescribed : Our father, &c.

MATTH. vi. 10.

Thy kingdom come.

THE present season, my devout audience, is set apart to commemorate the coming of our lord and his kingdom upon earth. It is therefore called Advent, and is considered among christians as a season of peculiar solemnity. This coming of our lord was in itself so remarkable an event, and its consequences are so manifold and important, and have proved upon the whole so salutary to us and to mankind in general, that the memorial of it highly deserves to be frequently renewed, and upheld to the end of time. The arrival of an ambassador from the deity, announcing to us the will of the Eternal and Invisible and his benign and gracious dispositions towards us ; the arrival of a teacher who delivers pure truth, and the most important, most indispensable truth to mankind, with far greater authority than any teacher before him
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had done or could do; the arrival of a perfectly pure and holy spirit, who in a human form by example and by doctrine, displays to our view the sublimest wisdom, the most inviolable integrity, the purest sanctity, and renders them no less venerable than amiable; the arrival of a safe and faithful guide on the thorny and difficult road of human virtue and happiness; the arrival of a helper and benefactor, a deliverer and saviour, living solely for his brethren, and sacrificing all, even his life, for their sakes: what a remarkable phænomenon! How wishfully must numbers of reflecting and well disposed persons, who were sighing after light and true felicity; men of different nations, have beheld the coming of such heavenly aid! and how completely were the wishes of the wisest and best of mortals answered by it! What revolutions, what salutary revolutions were effectuated by this coming of our lord into the world! With him came light into the darkness which perplexed and shrouded nature, comfort and confidence into the hearts of mankind, truth and certainty into their conceptions of the most important objects, dignity and grandeur into their sentiments, firmness into their character, regularity and harmony into their behaviour, greater capacity for the enjoyment of good, more strength and courage for the sustaining of evil, more force for doing and suffering. With him and through him

him came the kingdom of God. The moral sovereignty of God over mankind, his sovereignty over their mind and their heart, was signally extended and confirmed, and the virtue and happiness of his subjects founded thereon, augmented. Indeed only by little and little, first by tardy steps, agreeably to the nature of this spiritual heavenly kingdom and its subjects. First the basis and preparatives, then the superstructure; a structure that is carried on from one generation to another, from age to age, and will only be completed in eternity. Therefore Jesus teaches his disciples and their scholars in our text to pray: Thy kingdom come; may it be continually more extended, confirmed, glorified, however little and inconsiderable it may be at its rise and commencement! Yes, my pious hearers, as in the natural world, the largest plants and trees shoot up from diminutive seeds and tender sprouts, expand themselves only by little and little, often slowly and imperceptibly to the eye, and at length afford shelter and food and protection to myriads of creatures: so it is with the kingdom of God, with his predisposals in the moral world. Let us enter more at large into the subject. Let us somewhat more circumstantially consider: first, wherein the moral kingdom of God consists; or how God rules over mankind, and governs them as moral creatures. Secondly, how this kingdom

dom comes, or whereby this sovereignty of God is extended and established, and lastly, what we have to do in this respect, if we earnestly wish for the amplification and the prosperity of that kingdom.

Universal and boundless is the sovereignty of God, the Almighty, over all that is and lives and thinks, both over the intellectual and the corporeal world, over our thoughts and sentiments as well as over our outward motions and actions. As poverty and riches, elevation and abasement, light and darkness, prosperity and adversity, life and death, are in his hand : so likewise intellectual powers and advantages, the life and nourishment and health of the soul, knowledge of truth and deficiency of that knowledge, moral strength and weakness, the dominion of virtue and the dominion of vice, liberty and thralldom, happiness and misery, depend on him ; and regarding these no more than regarding those, can anything be and happen without his superintendence, without his permission, without his will. Of this the idea of an intelligence supremely perfect, whom we revere as the creator and governour of the world, allows us not in the smallest degree to doubt.

• Only the methods whereby God rules and governs his creatures are different according to the diversity of their nature and destination. If he use some, which are not capable of conscious-

ness, of consideration, of morality, merely as the instruments of his power, and prosecute his designs by them, without their knowledge, without their volition, without their concurrence ; so he permits others, whom he has endowed with understanding and liberty, to act according to their own perceptions, to pursue the objects of their own discriminating choice, and employ their faculties by perspicuous principles, or by obscurer sensations ; yet so that all are under his controul, and all by him so favoured and advanced, or so impeded and retarded, so conducted and connected, as is exactly conformable to the all-comprising plan of his consummate wisdom.

The several predispositions therefore which God has made in nature and by religion, to the awakening, to the expansion, to the exercise of the human intellect ; all the excitations and resources, which he has given and still gives mankind, to reflect upon truth and error, to sharpen their understanding and feelings, to extend and correct their ideas of invisible and intellectual objects, all events and contingences whereby he calls their attention to themselves, to their destination, to the difference between right and wrong, between virtue and vice ; all the instruction that he imparts to them by reason and conscience, by his works and ways, or by persons particularly stirred up to that end, concerning

cerning himself and his will and the way to happiness: all this together constitutes the moral government of God over mankind, and is what the scripture terms the kingdom of God, or the kingdom of Jesus Christ. According therefore to the degree in which the intellectual faculties of man are unfolded and exercised; in which prejudice, error, vice, ignorance and insensibility are diminished, in which knowledge of truth, love of goodness, wisdom and virtue, true religion and piety are increased and encouraged; in short, according as individuals or entire nations become more intelligent, better and happier: in that proportion the kingdom of God and of Jesus Christ comes and is extended; in the same proportion is the moral sovereignty of God over mankind more universal and efficient.

The method in which the kingdom of God comes, is therefore extremely various and manifold. As its range is not confined to any particular nation or any one class of people, so neither does its extension and advancement depend on any one peculiar channel or medium of knowledge and improvement. Nature and religion, reason and scripture, our own reflection and the information of others, pure truth and truth mingled with error; all that cultivates, informs, improves and exercises the faculties of man; all that causes and promotes light, consideration and free agency, spiritual life, rational

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reflection

reflection and moral sentiment among the human race ; all are so many predispositions of God for the enlargement of his kingdom, means which he employs in ruling over the hearts and minds of men, and in conducting them to perfection and happiness in a way adapted to their nature. Never has God left himself without a witness among mankind in this respect ; never ceased to provide for the support of truth and goodness, whether in the bud or in the expansion, and to favour and encourage them, now in this way and then in another. But only the impartial and unprejudiced judge of the true and good, only the attentive observer of individuals and the events of their lives remarks this solemn process of divine providence, this occult but always progressive agency of the kingdom of God. Would we acquire that judgment and that observation, we must take several particulars into consideration.

The first is this : The kingdom of God and of Christ came, and still comes, one while more immediately and at another more mediately. More immediately it came through the prophets, and particularly through Jesus and his apostles, whom God endowed with full powers and with extraordinary gifts and energies, as his messengers, as the promulgators of his will, as the founders of a new religious institution, as the teachers of truth and happiness ; and so it still comes

comes through all the good and salutary effects, which their doctrine produces and will produce to the end of time in human souls. So has come the kingdom of God since the origin of christianity from one people to another, from one part of the inhabited globe to the other, has won and subjected to itself the understandings and the hearts of millions of persons, diffusing far around it light and life and intellectual energy and comfort and felicity ; and so will it continue always enlarging its borders under the direction of the Supremely wise and Supremely-bountiful, and always producing greater accessions of happiness and virtue.

But also more mediately, my pious hearers, came and still comes the kingdom of God, the kingdom of truth and human happiness, through all that eminently wise and good men in all ages and among all nations have done and still do towards the moral instruction and improvement of their brethren ; and to this we should pay great attention, lest we should judge too partially of the kingdom of God, and restrict it to too narrow bounds. Thus it came through the legislators, through the popular poets and sages of antiquity ; thus, for example, through Socrates and his disciples ; thus came it even through Muhammed, who, together with the errors which he taught, also disseminated and established many great, important, essential truths

truths of religion among a very considerable part of the inhabitants of the earth, and thereby occasioned and effectuated an incalculable amount of good. Nay, the doctrines and precepts of wisdom and virtue, which the wise of all ages and nations in their discourses and writings have propagated and recommended among mankind, are, so far as they contain truth, as much divine doctrines and precepts, as those which have obtained credence and respect through Moses or other prophets. The sound understanding and reason of man, his inward sense of what is true or false, good or bad, are, no less than revelation properly so called, means whereby God makes known to us his will, and grounds and establishes his kingdom among us, his moral sovereignty over us. For to the attentive, reflecting man, — and such there have always been and still are among all nations and people — to such an one, everything is the voice of God, the instruction of God, the revelation of God, whether it be outward objects or inward thoughts and sentiments, that give rise to those reflections and conduct him to the track of truth. Indeed he does not always follow that track, seldom follows it far, exchanges it often for the devious paths of error, or the labyrinth of doubt. Yet never entirely in vain are those rays of light emitted, not totally fruitless do those seeds of truth and happiness remain ;

main; sooner or later they spring up, and the more the soil is cultivated, the oftener it is refreshed with gentle showers, the more fruit is to be expected from them.

The other particular that we should observe with regard to the coming of the kingdom of God and the methods of it, is this: The kingdom of God and of Jesus Christ came and still comes, one while in a more visible and striking, at another in a more invisible and latent manner. It never comes indeed, as Jesus says himself, with noise and ostentation. Its weapons are not carnal, but spiritual. Its goods and distinctions are not meats and drinks, not pomp and magnificence, but righteousness, peace and joy in the holy ghost. It is no temporal, earthly kingdom, and all that is called compulsion and force, all that dazzles and deceives the senses is in opposition to the spirit of truth and the nature of the moral kingdom of God. Yet its progress is at one time more remarkable than at another. Visibly and with great power came this kingdom in the first periods of christianity. What effects, what revolutions did it produce both among individuals and whole nations! How widely diffused, how greatly augmented in those ages were light and life and liberty and virtue and felicity! Visibly and with great power it came too in a considerable part of Europe at the period of the Reformation. What
salutary

salutary shocks, what happy revolutions did it then occasion and effect in the understandings and affections, in the faith and lives of mankind! —

But this kingdom, my pious hearers, usually comes and acts in a less remarkable and visible manner. The doctrines of truth and of christianity were preached, heard, combated, believed, adopted, rejected, sometimes mingled with more sometimes with fewer errors, sometimes in pure sometimes in impure intentions, sometimes delivered in one method sometimes in another: and thus were raised or renewed in the minds and hearts of thousands and thousands of persons, sentiments, reflections, opinions, judgments, emotions, resolutions, productive sometimes of more sometimes of fewer good consequences. The seed falls in the earth, and according to the various quality of the soil and the season of sowing, it springs up sometimes sooner sometimes later, brings forth sometimes more sometimes less generous fruits, or is choaked by weeds, or obstructed in its growth by luxuriant thorns and thistles.

In the mean time truth and christianity continue their course in silence and concealment. It happens perhaps but rarely, that great and signal alterations in the moral condition of men ensue; perhaps we have it but seldom in our power to say: This person is translated from
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the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light ; that other, from a slave of vice, is become a votary and friend of virtue ; that doubter is brought to belief and certainty, and this volatile character to serious reflection, to prudence and discretion : yet so much the oftener is the knowledge of the one corrected and extended, the belief of the other fortified, the good sentiments of a third confirmed and encouraged, or some latent germ of truth and virtue expanded and fructified in a fourth. And who is able to reckon up all the just reflections, all the worthy sentiments, all the pious resolutions, acts and efforts, which by nature and religion, by reason and christianity, by all kinds of information and tuition, and by the several other means that God makes use of in his kingdom, are occasioned and awakened, and whereby mankind are brought nearer to the true end of their creation, and formed into rational, moral subjects of God and of Jesus Christ.

Observe in the last place, my devout hearers, if you would rightly judge of the subject, this one thing more : The kingdom of God and of Jesus Christ comprehends the whole human race, according to the several degrees of their culture, their illumination and improvement, their approaches towards perfection. It is neither confined to any particular nation nor to any particular period of time. It comprehends all people,

people, all ages, all revolutions of eternity. It is one entire whole, one grand, immense and infinitely extensive whole, of which we can perceive no more than single and small fragments, and which God alone surveys in all its causes and effects, in all its parts, in all its combinations, and contingences; a whole that connects the present with the future, the visible with the invisible, time with eternity, the earth with heaven; a whole, whose commencements seem but little and insignificant, whose progress seldom strikes the eye, yet never stands still, and the end whereof will be all-involving perfection and happiness.

The more distant this end at present seems, and the more glorious it will be; the more natural must be the wish expressed in our text, Thy kingdom come, to every reflecting, well-disposed person, to every christian, who in very deed deserves that name. Thy kingdom come! May truth, wisdom, virtue, liberty, happiness; may sound reason and true religion be constantly farther disseminated amongst mankind! May error, superstition, vice, slavery and wretchedness be enervated and diminished from day to day! May christianity, in all its scope and tendency, be always more completely manifesting its divine efficacy in the hearts and minds of its professors, and through them in the hearts and minds of such as are not! May it constantly

constantly be more accurately understood, more heartily believed, more faithfully followed by all who bear the honourable title of christians ! Yes, this is the wish, the most earnest wish of men, of christians, who are justly entitled to either the one or the other of these appellations.

Wilt thou shew in fact, o man, o christian, that this is the wish of thy heart, that thou sayst, Thy kingdom come ! in spirit and in truth, with understanding and sentiment : accelerate and promote the advancement of the kingdom of God and of Jesus Christ, extend its boundaries, confirm its authority and its dominion, increase the number and the zeal of its subjects, as far as it depends on thee, and is within thy power. Hast thou uncommon intellectual abilities, conspicuous talents ; art thou placed in a superior station, dost thou fill an important post ; dost thou act in a greater, in a wider sphere : apply all those advantages to the propagation of much more truth, wisdom, virtue, liberty, happiness among thy brethren, mediately and immediately, by thy authority, by thy information, by thy example, by thy fortune. Consider and conduct thyself as an instrument in the hand of God to the extension and advancement of his kingdom upon earth, and strive to render thyself increasingly more worthy of that distinguished honour. But canst thou, by means of thy station and calling, thy capacities

cities and powers, do but little in this respect ; do that little with diligence and fidelity, and so render thyself fit for greater trusts. Advance the kingdom of God among thy domestics, among thy acquaintance and friends, though thou art not able to do it in larger societies, and in a wider range. Contend against error, superstition, vice and moral bondage, wherever thou hast opportunity and inducement ; but do it constantly in a way suited to the nature of the kingdom of God, with an affectionate heart and a gentle spirit. Let the light, the light of wisdom and virtue, that illuminates thee, extend itself to all around thee, and promote the knowledge of truth, the love of goodness, rational reflection and prudent gravity, just conceptions and generous sentiments by all thou sayst and dost. Be particularly concerned to make christianity honourable in the sight of all men by a truly christian temper and a truly christian life, Thus deprive the infidel, the ~~corner~~, the witting of all pretexts for his infidelity, his mockery, his levity. Let all who are acquainted and connected with thee, perceive and remark how contented and cheerful christianity renders its genuine confessors. So wilt thou discharge the duty of a subject of God and of Jesus Christ, and hereafter enjoy the superior, everlasting blessings of the kingdom of heaven. Amen

Advent.

SERMON VI.

Of the future general Judgment.

GOD, Lord God, gracious, merciful, long-suffering, abundant in goodness and truth, who shewest mercy, and forgivest iniquity, transgression and sin; how can we doubt that there is pity and forgiveness with thee, since thou art essential benignity and love! We to whom thou hast given such extraordinary proofs of it by thy son Jesus, for whose deliverance thou hast done so much! Error and sin had separated mankind from thee, the fountain of light, of life, of happiness — had enfeebled, embased them, and had brought on them a variety of woe. They were slaves to vice, and the children of death. Tormented by reproaches and doubts, they lived without comfort, without hope, without thee in the world. The true, the direct way that leads to felicity and to thee, was concealed from the generality of them, — to all of them was covered with darkness and encompassed with frightful obstacles. And thus they wandered

dered through numberless perilous and devious paths; and, laden with trespasses and sins, were approaching a futurity which must necessarily alarm and confound them. But thou, abundant in mercy, hadst pity upon them and upon us, as a father pitieth his children. Thou sentest us a teacher, a guide, a deliverer; and with him and through him thou hast given us light and comfort and hope! Yes, thou didst not spare thy own, thy best beloved son, but gavest him up for us. For our sakes thou sentest him from heaven upon earth, subjected him to the lowest contumely, to the most painful sufferings, to the most ignominious death, and didst cause him to die as a sacrifice for the sins of the world. We now know thy gracious dispositions towards sinful man. Now, on returning to thee and to our duty, we need not dread the punishment we have deserved as transgressors of thy law. Now we need not doubt of thy readiness to pardon sins and to give us grace for justice. Now we may proceed confidently towards our future destination. Through Jesus we have free access to thy favour; an authentic assurance of thy parental benevolence and love; a certain hope of immortality and everlasting life. His death is our life! — Here we present ourselves before thee, o God, ready and resolved to devote ourselves entirely to thy service! Our body and our soul, our time, our faculties, our possessions,
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all that we are and have we offer up unto thee in testimony of our gratitude; resolving to use them agreeably to thy will, as befits obedient children of the most gracious father and the redeemed of thy son Jesus! Confirm; establish us by thy good spirit in the execution of this purpose. Make us true followers of Christ, that at his second coming to judge the world we may be found acceptable in thy sight. Our father, &c.

ACTS xvii. 31.

Because he hath appointed a day in the which he will judge the world in righteousness, by ~~that~~ ~~man~~ whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.

THE discourse of the apostle to which the words of our text belong, is extremely remarkable, both on account of its subject matter and the particular conjunctures in which it was delivered. St. Paul pronounced it at Athens; a city which, having long been the principal residence of the sciences and the fine arts, was become the standard of good taste and polite manners; a city where every branch of learning flourished, where philosophers of various sects abounded; a city withal where in place of a rational and liberal form of religion, a gross and stupid idolatry universally prevailed. He held this discourse in presence of the most respectable personages of the nation, before those fa-
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mous athenian judges who had the superintendence of the public worship, and whose decisions were regarded in a manner as the decrees of justice and equity. Before this tribunal the messenger of Jesus was cited to appear. Here he was commanded to give an account of the doctrine he preached; for enabling them to determine, whether it were of such a nature as might consist with their religion and government. With what prudence, with what earnestness, with what energy, does Paul here maintain the honourable character he bore! How gladly does he seize the opportunity, and how wisely does he make use of it, for combating error, for bearing witness to the truth, and for promoting the good cause of the master by whom he was sent! He strives, before all things, to excite their attention, and to remove the prejudices they had conceived against him. He then proceeds to set the principles of natural religion, and the reasonable service of God, in their strongest light, and thus prepares the minds of his auditory for the reception of the gospel which he announced to mankind in the name of Christ. We will hear him himself, just briefly paraphrasing his speech. We shall be forced, my friends, to admire the discourse. — Ye Athenians, says he, you accuse me of the design of introducing new and foreign idols; but I must confess, that the number of them is already
much

much greater among you than I could have hoped. Incredulity on this head can never, most certainly, be made your reproach. It even appears to me as if you far exceeded other nations in your reverence for what relates to religion. For, coming through the public place, and contemplating the objects of your worship, I saw, among others, an altar whereon was inscribed, TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. Now this God, whom you worship without knowing him, this very God would I bring you to the knowledge of. He it is, who created the heaven and the earth and all that is therein, and who by his providence preserves and governs all. But the great creator and ruler of the world cannot possibly be confined to temples made with human hands. The whole expanse of heaven cannot contain him. He is self-subsistent; he is self-sufficient, and his perfection and felicity are incapable of addition. He has therefore no need of the services of mankind; that they should bring him food, presents and oblations. He himself has given to them the life, the breath and whatever else they possess; and they depend entirely on him. He made all men to proceed from one. He distributed them into numerous tribes and nations; and gave them to inhabit the earth. In his infinite wisdom he fore-appointed to each the time when he should appear on this scene, and when he should quit it, previously

viously decreed the place he should fill in it, and the condition in which he should live. His design herein was, that they might seek him, that they might recognize his existence and his perfection, that they might obey him, and be happy in his favour. Neither is it so very difficult to arrive at that knowledge. All the works of creation testify of him, and praise his unbounded majesty, though he himself be invisible to the eyes of mortals. Whoever reflects with due attention on himself and the things about him, must of necessity discover him, and every where behold evidences of his power and goodness. For he is not far from every one of us. He is every where present. In him we have our being, in him we live and move. From him our honoured lineage springs, as some of your own poets have said. If then we be descended from him; if he be the father of spirits, as well as of all flesh; if he be the source of those prerogatives which adorn and exalt us as reasoning beings; if in this respect we bear his image: then it is impossible for him to be like anything framed by human ingenuity of gold or silver, of wood or stone, though of ever such exquisite workmanship. The sensuality to which the bulk of mankind are ever prone indeed retained them long in that erroneous opinion; but God, who beheld those times of ignorance with the utmost displeasure, has according to his immense

mense benignity and mercy in our days so plainly, and so indubitably revealed his will, that he now commands all men to repent, and to forsake their idolatry with the rest of their vices. For he has appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man, namely Christ, whom he has ordained to that purpose. And of this determination he has given the most credible and authentic evidence, in that he has raised him from the dead. — Here the apostle was interrupted in his discourse, just when, as it should appear, he was proceeding to state more circumstantially the important doctrine, that Jesus is the son of God, the saviour and lord of mankind. Some, probably of the epicureans, who, that they might more quietly follow their lusts, wholly denied the future state, made sport of what he had said: others, very likely of the stoicks, who on this article had juster notions, and were more impartial, were desirous of further information from him; several again, among whom was Dionysius, a distinguished member of the areopagus, actually became converts to Christ. We shall at present confine ourselves to the latter part of the speech of St. Paul, and for our edification treat it somewhat at large. May these considerations make such an impression on us, as nothing shall weaken or efface, as shall remain fixed and engraven on our hearts, and be the regulating principle of our whole behaviour!

haviour! O God, do thou bless this design, and grant that we may all experience its salutary effects!

The important doctrine contained in our text naturally divides itself into the following five propositions: there will infallibly be a future judgment: this judgment will be general, and extend to the whole human race: righteousness and equity will pass sentence in it: Christ, the son of God, who is also the son of man and our mediator, will hold this judgment: hereof God has given us the most certain and undeniable evidence, in that he has raised him from the dead. These five propositions we shall briefly illustrate and establish, for evincing the propriety and force of that part of the apostle's speech which we have just read to you.

Even the light of nature furnishes us with several cogent reasons for supposing, that after this life there will be another state, and therefore also a judgment which will chiefly consist in regulating and ascertaining the state of mankind according to the tenour of their past conduct. I shall not at present appeal to the universal belief of antient and modern nations, of whose religious opinions we have any ample account; as it may very well be, that they all have drawn those doctrines from one and the same fountain. I mean a divine revelation promulgated in the earlier ages of the world, I will
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simply advert to the nature of mankind, and their destinies here on earth, for confirming this proposition. With ever so moderate a knowledge of ourselves, we cannot deny that we are moral agents ; that is, such creatures as may and should act not from blind instinct or from an inevitable necessity, but from counsel and discernment and according to stated laws, and which consequently are capable of rendering an account and of particular retributions. The difference between virtue and vice, between right and wrong, is grounded in the nature of things. It is eternal and unchangeable ; and we have the means of perceiving that difference, and of regulating our conduct by it. We see what is good or bad, what is becoming or unbecoming, what is consonant or repugnant to the relations we bear to God and to our neighbour. We can chuse the former, and reject the latter. We can comply with the gentle voice of conscience, which prompts us to the one and dissuades us from the other, or we can resist it. We can judge whether our actions deserve praise or blame, reward or punishment ; and that judgment always produces, when any attention is paid to it, agreeable or disagreeable sensations, serenity and satisfaction, or disquietude and remorse. But has God, who is essential wisdom, formed us moral creatures, and capable of rendering account, without treating us as such, and actually requiring

ing of us that account? Or, shall it be of like import with him, the purest and holiest being, how we apply the capacities and powers with which he has endowed us; of like import whether we observe the laws he has prescribed us, or not; whether we reach the ends for which he has designed us, or deviate farther and farther from them? Shall he who governs the universe, be an unconcerned spectator of the good and evil that happens in it? Shall the God, in whose empire the most beautiful order and harmony on all sides prevail, be only indifferent to moral disorders, which are certainly the most pernicious of all? Shall all things, the very meanest not excepted, be under his inspection and controul; and man, ennobled by reason and liberty, be abandoned to himself? Shall he presume to steer his course as folly or caprice directs; and his creator not be at the same time his supreme legislator and judge? And as such shall he never manifest his favourable acceptance of the legitimate, and his displeasure at the illegitimate behaviour of his subjects? No! unless we run counter to all the notions we have of the perfections of God, we must come to this conclusion: that it is an essential part of his government to bring to judgment such creatures as we are, and to reward or to punish them according to their conduct. If we cast an eye on the fates and fortunes of mortals

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here on earth, this conclusion will acquire a superior degree of force. Can we behold in the course of human affairs the wise, the righteous, the virtuous, the upright votary of God and Christ, struggling with misery, and living in the utmost scorn, in the extremest poverty, in the severest bondage ; can we observe him cruelly persecuted on account of his integrity and piety, despoiled of his goods and his fame, reduced to eat the bread of sorrow and drink the waters of affliction, enduring the most excruciating torments, and dying an ignominious and painful death : can we on the other hand behold the fool, the libertine, the worthless and the infamous, the slave of vice, the insolent despiser of God and religion rioting in the abundance of life and enjoying what their hearts could wish, prosecuting unmolested their nefarious projects, gratifying their sordid appetites to the full extent of desire ; can we see them violently oppressing the most unspotted innocence, sullying the most beneficent virtue by malicious slanders, and invading the rights both of God and man : can we, I say, behold all this, and yet believe that the scene ends here ; that this act of human life is both the first and the last ; that the real character of the man shall never be brought to light ; that the noblest virtues on the one hand, and the most shocking vices on the other, are to remain in concealment for ever ? No ! God would

would not be the Holy, the Just, as he actually is, on the supposition that he could in a manner equally approve, by regarding with total apathy and negligence these different procedures of mankind; were he to require of them no account; were he not in another life to assign a different condition to the wicked and the just, suited to their different conduct; if he do not publicly pronounce his decretory sentence, and thereby manifest the rectitude of his dealings with mankind. This is the voice of reason. But ignorance and vice, wantonness and security, had drowned that voice, and well-nigh put it to silence. God therefore in his mercy caused it to resound afresh to mankind by the gospel, and to address them with more force and energy than ever. The momentous doctrine of the future judgment is now put out of doubt. Every difficulty that might have been urged against it is henceforth removed. It now reposes on divine authority. It is now so plainly declared, that it is adapted to the meanest and lowest capacities, and deprives us of all excuse. Christ and his apostles teach and assert it expressly in almost every page of the sacred writings. They say, that God will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts; that he will render to every man according to his deeds; that, to them who, by patient continuance in well doing, seek for
glory

glory and honour and immortality, he will grant everlasting life : but on them who obey not the truth, he will inflict indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish. And the apostle Paul affirms, in our text, that God has appointed a day in the which he will judge the world in righteousness, by that man whom he hath ordained.

No less certain is it likewise secondly, that this judgment will be general, that it will extend to the whole human race. It will, as our text declares, be held upon all the inhabitants of the earth. No one will be exempted from it : those who have died in all antecedent ages, as well as those that shall then be found alive : the great and the mighty of the earth, who formerly were judges themselves, and determined the fates of whole countries and nations ; as well as the poor and abject, who depended on their arbitrary decrees, and who were not unfrequently the unhappy victims of their depraved passions : the rich, who purchased honours and applause with their treasures, and thus sheltered themselves from the upbraidings of mankind ; as well as the poor, who were contemptible in their eyes by their outward condition, and exposed to their malignant frowns : all these, without distinction of rank, of sex or age, will appear before the judge of the world ; all must deliver up an account of their past behaviour. “ For he, which is lord over all, shall fear no man’s person, neither shall he

he stand in awe of any man's greatness ; for he hath made the small and great, and careth for all alike." He is the creator and ruler of all men ; they are all his subjects. Their lives and their destinies are all in his hands. No man can escape from his jurisdiction. No man can hide himself from the eyes of the Omniscient. Here no artifice avails, no cunning, no authority, no resistance, no violence. At his summons all must appear before his throne. His nod all nature must obey. Hear how St. John describes this awful scene, as he saw it depicted in a vision : " I saw the dead," says he, " small and great, stand before God ; and the books were opened. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it ; and death and the grave delivered up the dead which were in them ; and they were judged every man according to his works."

Every man according to his works ! Righteousness and equity then will pronounce the sentence in this solemn judgment. This is the third proposition comprehended in our text. God, it tells us, will judge the world in righteousness. The laws which he has promulged to mankind, by nature and revelation, will be the rule of his judgment : by them will he examine their conduct, and fix their destinies. Only true righteousness and virtue will be approved and rewarded ; only actual criminality and vice will be condemned and punished. Here no fallacy

lacy and no dissembling have place. Appearance, however strong and imposing, must here give way to reality. Here will the artful mask be snatched from the hypocrite and the deceiver, under which in this world they hid their hideous visage ; here the most illustrious birth, the most exalted rank, the highest authority, the largest sums of gold, will nought avail ; here all outward distinctions, which might bias the judgments of this world, will be of no significance ; here no evasions, no excuses, no palliations, of intentional sins and predominant turpitude will be admitted. The laws are clear ; the judge is impartial, and regards not the persons of men. The conduct of each individual presents itself to him in the most perspicuous light. He views it in its full extent, in all its motives and intentions. He knows how to estimate the worth of each particular action with the nicest precision, and to poize the concomitant circumstances that may magnify or extenuate it. He will therefore judge each individual by the degree of capacities and powers he has vouchsafed him, by the measure of talents and privileges he has committed to him, by the greater or smaller light that has enlightened him, by the resources he has possessed, by the instruction he has received, by the connections in which he has stood, by the stronger or weaker obstructions and temptations he has had

to

to overcome. To whom little was given, of him will but little be required ; but to whom much was committed, of him will be asked the more. By the light of nature will the heathen be judged ; by the revelation which God imparted to the patriarchs of the old œconomy will the jews be tried : the gospel which he has proclaimed to us by his son will be the rule with christians. Every one, as the holy scriptures repeatedly declare, will receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad. Thus shall the judge of all the earth do right, and in righteousness judge the nations. No one will have reason to complain of his sentence ; no one can say he has been dealt with unjustly, since the obstinate sinner will be condemned by his own conscience. But the joyfullèst praises of divine compassion will be heard from the mouths of the absolved, because the Lord has not dealt with them in the rigours of righteousness, (for in that case who could stand in his sight ?) but according to the multitude of his mercies, and has accepted their sincerity instead of actual perfection. What an animating consolation for all true believers, for every upright worshiper of God ! They see the multitude and the enormity of their sins ; they feel their own unworthiness ; they know the defects and imperfection of their best qualities and virtues. They labour indeed

indeed with assiduity at their improvement ; but they cannot ascend to the heights of holiness to which they aspire, and which God might require them to attain. But at this they need not be dismayed. They shall experience grace for justice.

Of this we can the less doubt, if we turn our thoughts fourthly on the person whom God has ordained to the execution of this august transaction. It is, as our text informs us, Christ, the son of man ; Christ, who was born in our nature, and in it experienced all the troubles and hardships of life ; Christ who was tempted in all things like us, that he might be a merciful high-priest, and have compassion on our infirmities ; Christ, who loved mankind to that degree, that he laid down his life for them, purchased them with his blood, and gave himself a sacrifice for them. What abundant consolation must it administer to all his sincere adherents and disciples ! What openings of joy, that their judge is their friend ; he is their brother ; he is their advocate, by whom they have access to the father. They stand in the most intimate and blessed relation to him. He has given them already the greatest, he has already given them singular and unexampled demonstrations of his favour and protection ; and such as he once has loved, he loves even to the end. What then have they not to expect from him ! What leni-

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nity, what indulgence, what compassion, may they not hope for from him ! To whom can they more contentedly entrust their final disposal and their salvation, than to him who has done and suffered so much for them, who died for them upon the cross ? But how tremendous on the other hand is this truth to such christians as refuse to have fellowship with him, and do not obey the gospel ! They will be judged by Christ ; by Christ whom they despise, whose heavenly doctrine they deride, whose gracious invitations they reject ; by Christ, whose divine authority they deny, to whom they refuse all reverence and obedience, whose commands they obstinately oppose, whose empire they dispute. What can they expect, but that he will say to them, I never knew you : depart from me, ye that work iniquity ? He will then, as the holy scriptures expressly declare, be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that do not obey his gospel. He will hurl them, as his foes, into the lake that burns with fire and brimstone. But, however great, however momentous these truths, however dreadful to the impenitent ; yet are they no less certain and undeniable.

God, as our text affirms, has given us the most authentic assurance of it, in that he has raised his son from the dead. Hereby has God
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confirmed his doctrine in the manner the most express, and so as to place it beyond all doubt in the eyes of impartial judges. He has stamped it with the seal of truth. He has publicly and solemnly recognized him as his messenger, as his son. Now may we safely trust to the discoveries Christ has made to us of the counsels of God, and of his designs upon mankind. Now may we confidently surrender ourselves to the information he has given us with regard to our future expectations. Now have all his promises and denunciations received a heavenly sanction ; all his words will be infallibly fulfilled. As various therefore and incontrovertible as are the arguments whereon the certainty of his resurrection rests ; so numerous and irrefragable are likewise the evidences we have of the general judgment which he has announced and published to mankind in the name of the Most High. Hence it is, that the conduct of this grand event is represented in the sacred books as a part or a consequence of the recompense which our saviour acquired as the accomplished mediator. Because he humbled himself and became obedient unto death ; therefore has God also highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name, that every knee should bow before him, and every tongue confess his dominion. Because he became the son of man, because as such he vindicated the rights

rights of God, asserted the sanction of his laws, and illustrated all his perfections; therefore, the father has committed all judgment to him, that all men should honour the son, even as they honour the father; and has given him authority, to execute judgment also, because he is the son of man. As surely then as God will keep his word, so surely will Christ administer on that day the business of the office entrusted to him, as judge both of the living and the dead.

What interesting doctrines, my friends! How strictly connected with our felicity! What a mighty influence should they have on our whole behaviour? Oh, christians, no longer resist the saving influence of these most awful doctrines. Consider, how dreadful they are to sinners, how consoling to the godly; and follow the rules they prescribe for our observance, that they may turn to your comfort and not to your confusion.

Is there a day of judgment to come; tremble, all you who forget your God, who have submitted to the service of unrighteousness and vice. Though you here may know how to evade the avenging doom of law; though you here can conceal your corrupt designs, your infamous lusts, your nefarious deeds, from the eyes of the world, and preserve the appearance of probity; though the Lord is patient and long-suffering towards you: yet will he not so continue
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for ever. This will all turn to your utter confusion hereafter. Nothing will be able to shield you from the Almighty. Your crimes will all be revealed, and cover you with consternation and horror. The divine compassion, which you have scorned, will give place to unrelenting justice; and you will not escape the punishment, the dreadful punishment, appointed for the hardened sinner. Would you prevent this deplorable catastrophe; consider your ways, and turn unto the Lord your God. Make haste, and deliver your souls. Prostrate yourselves in humility and contrition at the feet of the arbiter of the universe. Strive to obtain his grace in Christ, without which you cannot subsist in his presence. Fulfill the conditions on which he invites you to it. Strive, by a true repentance, by a lively faith, by a sincere conversion, to become susceptible of his acceptance. Abandon the service of sin; and employ your whole life in preparing for the eternity that stands before you, and into which you may so soon, so suddenly be hurried.

Is there a day of judgment to come; rejoice, ye righteous, who serve your God with upright hearts, and walk in his ways. Rejoice even though you are obliged to pass your days in obscurity and indigence; though you endure derision, contempt and persecution; though you experience the most cruel adversities and the

most grievous afflictions. All this will hereafter assume to your comfort a different aspect. The virtues you have practised in concealment here, the generous actions you have performed in silence, will then be placed in the clearest light; they will be publicly proclaimed, they will be crowned with the plaudits of celestial intelligences, with the approbation of God; your obscurity will be changed into glory, your shame into honour and your tears into bursts of joy. Your persecutors and scorers will be ashamed, and will envy your lot. This should alleviate to you all the afflictions of time, and render them tolerable. This should inspire you with an invincible fortitude under them, and stimulate you to perseverance in good. Continue to run with unabating ardour the race of holiness which is set before you. Its happy issue, and the unfading crown of life, certainly merit all the care, all the industry, all the zeal, you are able to exert. They will amply repay you for every difficulty you have bravely encountered, have joyfully overcome, and for your perseverance to the end.

Is the future judgment general, will none be exempted from it; this consideration should be an admonition to the potentates of the earth, that it is even their duty to descend from their thrones, to prostrate themselves in the dust, before him who is the uncontrouled, the uncontrouable

trouable monarch of heaven and earth, the lord of all dominion, to acknowledge their weakness and their dependence on him, to implore the favour of him who is their master as well as ours, and never to lose sight of that awful scene, when all their mightiness shall disappear, and not only no longer avail them, but will render their justification a more arduous concern. This consideration should induce the rich of this world, never to trust in their riches, to estimate their worth with reference to that day, when they can deliver or profit no man; to lay up treasures for the future state, and as faithful stewards of the goods entrusted to them, that they may not find themselves destitute, but be able to give up their accounts with joy. This consideration should likewise encourage the poor, the lowly, the oppressed and persecuted, who are conscious of an undissembled sincerity before God, not to let their courage fail, not to repent of their prudent choice, not to repine at their lot in sullen discontent; to raise themselves above the present, to soothe themselves with the hopes of futurity, and in serenity of soul commit all to him who judges right. This consideration should in fine excite us all, whether we fill high or humble stations among mankind, whether we be rich or poor, young or old, to serious and constant reflection on our future reckoning, so to judge our

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views, endeavours, actions, pleasures and sufferings, as we shall hereafter judge them ; to despise and to condemn all that we shall then despise and condemn ; and to approve of nothing, to esteem nothing, to love nothing, to do nothing, but what then will deserve our approbation and praise, what will then endure and outstand the trial.

Will that judgment be executed in righteousness ; oh put not your trust in things that will then avail you nothing. Trust not in the outward distinctions which indeed may procure you some respect among mankind, but which then will afford you no support, because they have no intrinsic value. Be not satisfied with bearing the name of christians and belonging to the people of God. Repose not in a bare knowledge of the truth, or in a barren and dead belief in the saviour of the world. Depend not on the zeal with which you have adhered to this or that religious party, or on the just ideas you have formed of the dogmas of christianity, or on the punctual observance of the rites of worship it prescribes. All this is insufficient to effect your deliverance at that great day. You must worthily employ the prerogatives with which you are adorned ; and the efficacy of the name you bear must be evinced by your conduct. Your knowledge must be lively ; your faith must be active in love, and fruitful in good works ;

works; your zeal must be rational and pure; your piety unfeigned and sincere; your orthodoxy in doctrine must be accompanied by rectitude in manners, if you would be able to stand the trial at that awful bar. Not opinions, not ceremonies, not outward privileges, but the moral deportment of mankind, will there be the object of scrutiny; their views will be examined, their works will be judged. Oh, my friends! strive to experience the efficacy of the religion your profess. Live consistently with your appointment and your vocation; follow after holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord. Be careful to fulfil the conditions whereon you are offered the gospel by heavenly grace; and urge onward to real perfection, as you would not hereafter be ashamed, but joyful and bold at the coming of the Lord.

Is it lastly Christ, the son of God, who is to hold and administer this judgment; and has God set that great truth beyond all doubt, by his doctrine and his resurrection from the dead; how will you escape, what will you plead in your excuse, you who despise the saviour and his salvation, you who reject his gospel in unbelief, who refuse to live under his sceptre of grace, and to revere and obey him as he requires? You despise him who sits on the right hand of the father, whom God has exalted to be lord over all, whom he has ordained to be judge
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of the living and the dead. You resist him who has power to save and to condemn, who must reign till he has made his enemies his footstool. You reject him who alone can deliver from the wrath to come, and besides whom there is no saviour. What perverseness! What absurdity! How will you endure the look of that majestic and offended judge? How will you be able to face his tribunal? By what will you defend yourselves against his fierce displeasure? How will you vindicate your opposition to that radiant light he caused to shine upon you, and your abuse of his proffered means of grace? Oh prostrate yourselves even now before him; deplore your disobedience to him with tears of deep contrition; and yield him the reverence so justly his due! Even now, while grace is offered, seize it with repentant faith, devoutly accept his sacred doctrine, cheerfully subscribe to his holy and transcendent law, and make the observance of it your chief concern. So may you expect his coming without dismay; so may you hope for it with complete assurance. You may, you must do so, christians, who deal sincerely with your saviour, who revere him as your lord, and follow him as his disciples. That day, which shall decide the fates of mortals, need give you no alarm. It will be a day of redemption, a day of glory, a day of triumph to you. What unutterable emotions of joy and gratitude

take our nature upon thee and become our brother—
confidence will you lift up your heads, what sounds of exultation will you express, when you discern your redeemer, whom you love at present though you have not seen him, coming in the clouds of heaven; when you behold his majesty and power, when you hear the gracious sentence of absolution from his mouth, when you draw near to him, when you enter his kingdom with him, to dwell therein for ever! O God, permit us not by our sins to forfeit this sovereign hope, to be excluded that exalted glory! Place thy judgment ever in our view; let the idea of it be always the guide of our conduct, and give us all to work out our salvation with fear and trembling.

Advent.

SERMON VII.

Joy on the Birth of Christ.

BLESSING and honour, thanksgiving and praise for ever be ascribed to thee, the God and father of our lord Jesus Christ and also our father! for having granted relief to us, thy children, thy forlorn, thy guilty children; such unmerited, such unexpected, such glorious relief, in sending thy son, and with him favour and life and felicity, to us on earth, and wilt now with him and through him grant us all things that can render us happy both in the present and in the future world! Eternally let heaven and earth, let all the angels and all mankind praise thee, o God, gracious and merciful, the God of all consolation, for this demonstration of thy more than parental benignity and love! And praised, for ever praised be thou, the son of the Father, the only-begotten, who for our sakes quitting heaven, didst exchange the habitation of thy glory for the abode of human misery, didst
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take our nature upon thee and become our brother, for exalting us to the highest dignity and happiness of the children of thy heavenly father ! Hail to thee, the messenger and author of peace, the deliverer from sin and death, the perfect saviour of the wretched and necessitous ; to thee who bringest us light and consolation and hope and confidence from heaven, and certifiest us of the way that conducts to it by the testimony of thy blood ? Blessed be thy arrival among the children of men ! Blessed thy great work on earth ! Yes, thy work is finished ! Thy blessing has blessed whole nations, and also us ! And in it we rejoice this day before thee ; for this we thank thee with united hearts. Oh that we but duly felt our happiness, were cordially sensible how happy we are, and may yet become through thee ! — O God, send down upon us the influences of thy holy spirit, that we may have a due sense of thy mercies and the love of thy son, and render to thee and to thy son the thanks and praise that they so justly demand. Bless the meditations upon them, in which we now purpose to engage, and hearken to our supplications which we present unto thee, in the words which thy son himself instructed us to use. Our father, &c.

LUKE ii. 10, 11.

And the angel said unto them: Fear not; behold I bring unto you tidings of great joy which shall be unto all people. For unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a saviour which is Christ the Lord.

I ALSO, my dear friends, announce to you this day tidings of great joy, which is and still shall be the portion not only of the people of the Jews, but also of you and of all the nations of the earth; and nothing do I wish for more than that you may feel this joy in as lively a manner, as those simple and pious shepherds in the plains of Bethlehem felt the joy announced to them by the messenger of the Lord! You have heard their story. It is the narrative of honest souls, sincerely believing in God and his word, expecting and hoping for succour from him, and who as soon as they receive it, accept and acknowledge it with heartfelt gratitude. Behold, how immediately on recovering from the consternation and amazement into which the celestial appearance, so unusual and unexpected, had thrown them; how the encouraging address of the angel: Fear not; behold I bring unto you tidings of great joy! animates them with courage and confidence! How they now, freed from all apprehension, listen with devout participation to the hymn of the heavenly host, and how the sacred strains of, *Glory to God in the*

the highest, on earth peace, and good will to men, sink deep into their hearts! How they carelessly leave their flocks, their principal, their only possessions, to roam unattended, and run to their humble, but happy cottages, to behold the new born babe, the lord and king of their nation, and be the first to pay their homage, of all whom he was to govern and to bless! And then how their mouths overflowed with the abundance of their hearts! How they publicly gloried in the happiness that had befallen them, and reported abroad the wonderful things they had seen and heard! How they praised and magnified God for all that had happened, and then joyfully returned to the employments of their calling; waiting in confidence for the further consolations of their God! Certainly a well-founded, a pure, a noble and pious joy!

And shall we, my dear friends, take a less lively interest in these transactions! shall our joy be less than their's! — Indeed, I, who here announce to you this joy, am no immediate messenger of heaven — I am a man like you; but, like you, a man longing for light, consolation and felicity; and finding in this event and its effects, what he would elsewhere have sought in vain. — — Indeed the joy I announce to you is not entirely new and unexpected, promising you felicities altogether unknown and unenjoyed! No; for upwards of eighteen hundred years

years the world has been rejoicing in the event which we commemorate this day ! Already many millions of persons have found and still find in the memorial of this event, comfort and serenity of mind and happiness ! But I announce to you a joy, the propriety and reasonableness whereof you may perceive and understand far better than those shepherds of Bethlehem ; a joy, the reasons and causes whereof lie before you in a far clearer light, and have sustained the severest trials both of enemies and friends ; a joy which indeed, soon after its origin, was again obscured, was combated by doubts, disappeared entirely to the generality of mankind, to many others was changed into barren desires, into languid hopes ; but which is now liable to no vicissitude, to no apprehensions that it may prove vain and futile ; a joy which is founded not simply on what was to happen for the salvation of mankind, but on what has actually happened for their salvation ; not on successful revolutions that were to be brought about, but on such as have been happily effected ; a joy, christians, the reality whereof you have already often experienced, the sweetness whereof you have already often tasted, and which still tastes the sweeter, still satisfies more fully, the oftener it is enjoyed.

How much greater, more lively and active ought it then to be with us, than it was with those
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those worshipers of God, who only perceived the first rays of that vivid light which shines on us; saw only the preparatives to the great work of God on earth, which is now so extensively and so gloriously prosecuted! They rejoiced in the new born saviour, who was to procure help and deliverance to his people; and should not we still more rejoice in the glorious relief and deliverance he has actually procured for them and us! They were glad at the arrival of the long expected king who was to ascend the throne of his father David, and be the redeemer of Israel; and shall not we be still more elated with joy at the triumph and the glory of our actually ascended lord and king, who sits at the right hand of the father, and has received of him all power in heaven and earth? Can there be a juster joy than our's? Oh that I might be thoroughly penetrated and inspired with it; and that I could thoroughly impart it to you! Yes, from thee, o God! the eternal, unwearied dispenser of joy, we look for it on this occasion; oh grant us all to feel it, and all to be bettered and more blessed by it!

Rejoice then, my dear friends, rejoice in the birth of Jesus! For here you have the most perspicuous, the most infallible proof, how highly mankind are honoured by the sovereign of the universe, how precious they are in his sight; how infinitely he loves them, how earnestly

earnestly he desires their happiness! Surely there must be an intrinsic worth in our nature, a real and permanent dignity, an indelible character of its high descent; it must be ordained to greater things, and be capable of greater, since God has done so much, so inexpressibly much to the deliverance and recovery of mankind! Was man no more than dust; were he entirely fettered to the earth, and doomed to complete everlasting corruption, that contemptible creature to which the slave of vice debases himself in the intoxication of his passions, and for which the fool, in the confusion of his ideas, holds himself and his brethren: wherefore would the creator be so mindful of us, and afford us such mighty aid — wherefore send to us his son, his beloved, from heaven; why connect him so intimately with us — why subject him to so many limitations and troubles, such a variety of pains and sufferings, and even to death itself? — Wherefore make previous adaptations and provisions so numerous and extraordinary, for that event, why give such striking, such manifest demonstrations of his interposition and his power in it; why cause it to be proclaimed by celestial messengers? Wherefore was all heaven as it were to be set in motion, and give vent to its joy in shouts of exultation to the glory of God, in hymns of praise because of human happiness? No; no, it cannot be denied, that

that man, even sinful, fallen man, is still of great account in the sight of his creator, is an object of his love, of his providence, of his succour! The deliverance and restoration of the human race is a grand, an important work, in the view of God; a work that he himself contrived and set on foot, that he accomplished by his son, the king of angels and of men, and in which the most exalted intelligences of heaven intimately and joyfully participate!

O men, o christians, acknowledge this; be sensible to your dignity; rejoice in it; lift up your eyes in confidence on high, direct them to him who formed you, who is your father, who cares for you with a more than parental solicitude, and intends your eternal welfare! Never be unmindful of your superior destination. Be ashamed of every degrading sentiment, of every disingenuous act, of every inhuman, brutal passion. No longer attach your heart to what is visible and earthly, soar in spirit to the realms above; renovate, assert the nobility of your mind, your rational, your immortal, your god-like nature; let all your thoughts and actions be correspondent with it. Be sensible to the happiness of having Jesus, the son of God, for your relative, for your brother; and never, oh never render yourselves unworthy of it by slavishly serving sin! Doubt now no longer of the love of God, your heavenly father; ask, hope,

hope, expect all things boldly of him, that are needful to your happiness. He who gave you his son, how shall he not, with him and through him give you all things?

Rejoice in the birth of Jesus, my christian brethren; for he was born, and has happily finished his earthly course, which was to give the world a new, a better aspect, was to change darkness into light, and to convert human misery into happiness; and we know, we experience that he has actually effected it! Sad was the condition of the earth; wretched and miserable the situation of our race before his coming! A sterile desert, as to fruits of righteousness and virtue, was this garden of God; this seminary of human wisdom, this place of preparation to a higher and better life was entirely covered with rampant weeds, with poisonous plants; a dreary wild to the view of superior, benevolent spirits; an abode of ignorance and vice, of atheism and idolatry! Here and there a sincere votary of the deity, who sighed in silence for relief, and lamented the misery of his brethren! Here and there some honest enquirer after truth, who struggled with doubts, and not unfrequently fell in the conflict! Here and there some patron of justice, some defender of innocence, some admirer of virtue, some active friend of humanity, some sage instructor or lawgiver, who manfully at-
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tacked the errors and the corruptions of the age, devoted himself to the information and the improvement of his brethren, exerted his utmost ability, and at last could bring little or nothing to effect! Almost all had mistaken the road of truth and happiness, wandered into the most dangerous by-ways, were slaves to the most infamous lusts and passions, were become utterly void of feeling, and lived without God and without hope in the world. Darkness covered the earth, and thick darkness the people. Vice and iniquity profaned the habitation of men, and made it to numbers an abode of wretchedness and woe. And just then, my dear friends, when distress was at its height and assistance the most wanted, then Jesus appeared, the instructor, the improver, the recoverer of the human race; and with him came light and comfort and joy and happiness from heaven upon the earth, and through him were truth and wisdom and virtue reinstated in their rights, they appeared again as guides and comforters on the path of life!

And thus how greatly altered was the condition of the earth, how much the situation of the human race! What blossoms, what fruits, what displays of spiritual, of heavenly life, where all before was barren and dead! What just conceptions of God and his will, of man and his destination, what good and generous deeds,

where error and vice before reigned uncontrouled! How many thousands and thousands of temples consecrated to the deity and his praise and to our direction on the road to happiness, where formerly vain idols were worshiped that were an insult to truth and virtue, and whose altars were stained with the blood of beasts and men! How many thousands and thousands of sincere intelligent votaries of God and of his son Jesus, where formerly were none, where all men prostrated themselves before wood and stone, before what was not God, and with servile terror adored that which knew nothing of it! How many grateful and joyous hymns of praise for the goodness of God and the present and future happiness of mankind now resound, where formerly none but the lugubrious tones of fear, of doubt, of corroding grief were heard! How many millions of more enlightened, improved, serene and happy persons have lived in the world during the eighteen centuries that have elapsed since the birth of Jesus, have had comfort of their lives in God and Jesus, have walked the way that leads directly and securely to perfection, avoided a thousand gloomy by-paths, a thousand insidious mazes, have discharged their duties with joy, have borne their afflictions with firmness and resolution, perpetually consoled themselves with the prize of their high calling full in view before
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them, have even conquered the terrors of death, and finished their course in hope and confidence! How much greater is now the general stock of human knowledge and wisdom and virtue and happiness than it formerly was! How much more diffused among all classes and conditions of men! How much more general and efficacious their influence on the judgments, the tempers, the behaviour, the pacification, the hope of all and every one!

Happy revolutions! Delightful consequences of the birth of Jesus, the great restorer of human happiness! Yes, this he was, and this he will be to the end of time! He has driven darkness and misery from a great part of the earth, has confined error and vice, idolatry and slavery within much narrower bounds, has resuscitated the deeply fallen race of man, has recovered it from its depression, and opened for it the way to continually greater accessions of perfection and happiness!

And these benefits have also been extended to us! His light has also enlightened us, and by the brightness of it we may walk securely! Also among us truth and virtue are of greater account than among the nations who know not him and his doctrine! Also we and our children know more of God and of religion and of a future state, than the most celebrated sages of antiquity! Also we have greater excitement

and greater ability to virtue, greater comfort in afflictions, greater hope in death, and greater prospects in a better world, than any of them could boast! — And he who began this great work on earth, the same will assuredly continue and complete it! To prosper and to bless, ever was and ever will be his delightful office. His light will continue to enlighten, his brightness will ever farther spread and at length dispell all darkness from the earth. Sooner or later shall every region be full of the knowledge of the Lord, all nations shall have but one shepherd, one teacher and king, compose but one fold, and all unite in the adoration of the only true God and in the veneration of his son and representative Jesus Christ. Oh be joyful in this, all ye that are the friends of God, the friends of truth and virtue, of mankind, your brethren! Rejoice in Jesus, who was born for the happiness of the world, for the recovery of the human race, who in this respect has done and still does so much, so infinitely much.

Rejoice particularly at his birth with regard to you, all ye to whom it is announced! For also unto you, to every one of you particularly and individually, a saviour, a deliverer, a helper is born; and which of you was not in want of such a saviour and deliverer, in order to be cheerful and happy? Or, have ye never felt how heavily past iniquities oppress mankind,
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how impossible it is for remorse of conscience and internal peace, for contentedness and dread of future punishment to subsist together? Have ye never felt how ardently your spirit thirsted after authentic information, after light and certainty, and how much ignorance and doubt on momentous points harrass and torment it? how eagerly it pants for liberty and aspires to perfection, how beautiful, how amiable virtue and goodness frequently appear to it, how earnestly you then wish to be truly virtuous and good, and how much at such times the sense of your weakness, the view of your repeated transgressions and failings, your vast distance from the goal, deject and confound you? Have ye never felt how much it imports to frail and mortal man, to a rational being verging at every step towards death and the grave, to see beyond death and the grave, to know, with certainty to know, what lot awaits him on the other side, whether he shall live or not live, whether he shall be miserable or happy? And if ye have felt this deficiency, these wants; if ye have felt this trouble, this distress, of an anxious, a doubting, an unsettled mind, a mind labouring under a sense of its guilt and its infirmity, a mind aspiring to rest, to energy, to perfection, and if ye still feel them in the serious hours of your life: oh how soothing, how delightful to you must be the tidings: 'To you, even to you, is born

born a saviour, a helper, the most powerful, affectionate and magnanimous helper! This is he who is willing and able to put an end to your distress, to supply your wants, to remedy your defects! This is he, by whom ye may be truly wise and virtuous, by whom ye may live contented and happy, and die no less easy than blessed! This is the ambassador of God, in intimacy with his heavenly father, come to conduct you to the knowledge, the most authentic knowledge of all necessary and wholesome truths, truths that exalt the mind and tranquilize the heart; the messenger and ratifier of peace, who on the part of God proclaims to you pardon and grace, complete forgiveness, total abolition of the past, and certifies you of his clemency and favour; the exterminator of sin, who will free you from guilt and punishment, will purge and sanctify your hearts, and put you in possession of real liberty! This is Christ, the lord, the head of his flock, from which the whole body and every member of it, receives nourishment and life and energy; the anointed of God, the king, to whom the Father has committed all things, and who rules his subjects with the utmost clemency, and directs them all to their best interests; the mighty leader and protector of his people, who is gone before them on the road of christian rectitude, inspires them with his spirit, strengthens them by the
energies

energies of love and hope, and thus helps and enables them to surmount all the difficulties and obstacles they meet in their way ! This is the conqueror of death ; the vanquisher of hell and the grave ; the resurrection and the life ! He that believeth in him shall not die eternally, but shall press forward, through death, to life and happiness.

Yes, my dear friends, this is he, that Jesus whose birth we proclaim to you, is he who, as certainly as he was born, so assuredly will be this to every one of you that hears me ! He will redeem you from all evil, from whatever bears the name of sin and misery will he redeem you, and help you to every kind of felicity of which you are capable, and for which you will allow yourselves to be qualified by him. With him you find light, consolation, ability to goodness, hope and assurance, all that you can possibly want. Come but boldly to him, seek in him the promised assistance, expect it of him in firm and immovable faith, suffer yourselves to be taught, corrected, conducted and led by him, open every inlet of your hearts to his spirit, to his sacred influence ; you will as certainly experience it, as certainly be tranquillized, invigorated, sanctified, rejoiced by it, as certainly as you ask it, in earnestness and faith.

You know this, you experience it daily, christians, you who are united with Jesus by
faith

faith and love, have sought and found help from him, and done fealty to him with willing obedience as your lord and king. By him ye have known the truth, and the truth has made you free. He has poured rest and peace into your hearts and given you confidence towards God. Of him ye have learnt to love both God and man, and in that love now find your strength and felicity. He has made you partakers of the divine nature, bestowed on you a heavenly temper, that raises you above visible things, and causes you already to think and live as citizens of heaven. And how can ye ever call to mind these experiences, how can ye ever enjoy these delights, without rejoicing in him, whose coming into the world procured them for you? How can ye celebrate the festival of his coming, and not exclaim from hearts expanding with sensibility: My soul now magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my saviour! for he that is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name! The day-spring from on high has visited me who sat in the depths of darkness, and has led me to the path of happiness; he has delivered me out of the power of all my enemies, and I can now serve him, without fear, in holiness and righteousness, all the days of my life!

Yes, my christian brethren, this pious, this holy joy should animate you all, should be the soul of all your festive devotion! And it will

be so, if you duly consider, how great the worth and dignity of man must be in the sight of God, with what happy transformations the coming of Jesus into the world has been attended, and what a perfect helper and saviour, what a mighty and gracious king, ye have in him, how blessed ye are already become through him, and how much more blessed through him ye still may be. Surely a more glorious gospel, more joyful tidings, could never have been proclaimed to man, than the gospel of his pardon and salvation, than the tidings of the coming of him by whom he was to be pardoned and saved ! Yes, christians, ye cannot but rejoice in him with all your heart, ye cannot but intensely feel the happiness conferred upon you ! But that joy must not be kept idly locked up in your hearts, must not remain inactive and inefficient ! It must break out in solemn adoration, in exultations and thanksgivings to God, and the saviour he has sent you, Jesus Christ ! It must be conspicuous in all your words and works, must be displayed in all your social and religious acts. All you say and all you do must shew that you rejoice in God and in his son Jesus, that you have been holpen with the most glorious help, that by that help you are saved, and hope to experience still greater salvation for ever ! It must be your glory and honour, that you are the redeemed of the lord, subjects of the king Christ Jesus, that you live under his government,

ment, in obedience to his laws, follow his example, and strive constantly more nearly to resemble and approach him ! Never, ah never, must ye be ashamed of him and his words, never render his doctrine and the imitation of him contemptible or suspicious by groveling sentiments, by negligence in goodness, or by a sullen and gloomy devotion and virtue !

No ; that joy should banish from your hearts every species of timidity and alarm, all ye that are christians in deed and in truth ! Thus you too are addressed by the heavenly messenger : Fear not ; be not dismayed ; ye have a deliverer, a lord and king, who is both able and willing to protect and succour and save you ? Fear not on account of the sins ye have formerly committed, but have heartily bewailed and entirely forsaken. To you is born a saviour, who is come into the world to destroy the works of sin, to remove its pernicious effects, and save to the utmost all that obey him. Fear not on account of the temptations of the world, nor of your own infirmities, nor the want of force and strength which so often depresses you ! To you is born a lord and king who protects and invigorates them that are his, who lives and acts in them and by them, and through whom they can do all things. Fear not on account of the sufferings and trials which probably await you ! This is he, who has undergone far more than you, who is become perfect through sufferings, and is entered

tered into glory, and who now experimentally knows our weakness, takes pity on all who are exercised like him, and sends them comfort and refreshment from the father. Fear not on account of death and the grave! He who was born for your benefit has deprived death of his power, the grave of its terrors, and has prepared you a kingdom, in which ye shall live and reign with him for ever!

And, in order that ye may continually rejoice in this hope, my christian brethren, and that this joy may never be taken from you; lastly, your strength must be in the Lord! It must give you pleasure and courage and vigour to the accomplishment of every duty, to the conquest of every difficulty on the journey of life, to the intrepid endurance of every affliction, to the constant and firm prosecution and completion of your course towards the mark of your high calling! Joy that neither makes us better nor carries us nearer to perfection, is not virtuous, is not godly joy. He who rejoices in God, is sensible to the value of his benefits and actually enjoys their felicity, oh how do love and gratitude impell him to render himself agreeable to his benefactor! How unconditionally does he submit and resign himself to his will! **How** completely does he acquiesce in his providence! How readily, how zealously does he obey all his commands! And he who rejoices in Jesus as his lord and king, perceives and feels how
much

much he is indebted to him, what a mighty deliverer and compassionate helper he has in him, how blessed he is become through him : oh how he is inflamed by love and the eagerness of gratitude to devote himself entirely to his service, to form himself entirely upon his model, to labour indefatigably and gladly in the amplification of his kingdom, in the advancement of his work on earth, and to strive for the prize in the very way that he obtained it ! Yes, christians, such should be your joy in Jesus and his salutary coming into the world. It should shed its influence on the whole tenour of your life, and be progressively more fruitful in christian sentiments and generous actions ? Should it however be not always alike lively and vigorous, it will yet always be encouraging and consoling to you. Its foundation remains for ever, its effects can never cease ; it is a sure earnest and pledge of still more elevated joy, of the joy at beholding your saviour and lord, made perfect and exalted over all ; not in the obscurity of his terrestrial, but in the glory of his heavenly life : not lying in the manger, but seated on his throne ; and then, with all the hosts of heaven, to join in the triumphant strain : Glory and honour and praise to God in the highest, and to his son, our Lord ! His work on earth is finished ; he has fulfilled his eternal purpose on the children of men !

Christmas-day.

SERMON VIII.

*What we should have been without the christian
Doctrine, and what we are and may become by it.*

GOD, our kind and merciful father, we rejoice together before thee on this solemn festival, for that thou hast so graciously pitied our forlorn condition and afforded us relief by thy son Jesus, and through him hast made such glorious provisions for our recovery and happiness. Ah how deeply had error and sin debased thy creatures, thy children of the human race! How greatly enfeebled, corrupted and deformed them! To what an abyss of misery brought them! And what darkness would have still covered us, how miserable should we yet have been, had not, through thy great and tender mercy, the day-spring visited us from on high, to enlighten us, whose forefathers were encompassed with darkness and the shades of death, and to guide our feet into the way of peace and happiness! Yes, heartily do we rejoice in that resplendent light that as christians enlightens us, in that balmy

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consolation which refreshes us in afflictions, that firm hope which animates us in death, those nobler sentiments and greater energies to goodness that we feel within us, in the new spiritual life which thou hast raised up in us and among us. Oh may the light that has arisen upon us be still farther and farther diffused, and even rescue our less happy brethren, who are not christians, from error, from vice, from misery! Oh may it likewise among us be constantly producing more knowledge and love of truth, a purer piety and virtue, greater contentment and felicity! Oh grant too that we may more and more clearly perceive our happiness and more worthily employ it; that we may walk in light, as the children of light: and constantly so think and live as becomes persons whom thou hast brought to the knowledge of thyself and of thy son, whom thou hast favoured with many advantages, and called to superior perfection and happiness. Bless to that end our reflections on these important objects, and let us on this festival rejoice with pious joy. Trusting in thy mercy, as thy children and as votaries of Jesus, and steadfastly confiding in his promises, we further address thee in his own comprehensive form of words. Our father, &c.

LUKE i. 78, 79.

Through the tender mercy of our God, whereby the day-spring from on high hath visited us. To give light to them that sit in darkness and the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.

WE are christians, my pious hearers, and rejoice and glory in it before God and man. Otherwise we should not solemnize the nativity of Jesus, the founder of christianity, and participate in the general joy of his confessors. But — whether we all duly perceive and feel the felicity of being christians? Whether we know it from conviction and experience? Were it so; surely we should in general pass our lives with far more content, far more serenity and complacency, have far greater enjoyment of our lives, and in all respects be far happier, and likewise reckon ourselves far happier than is the ~~case~~ at present. No; the complaints of distress and misery, of a deficiency of pleasure and happiness, of discontentedness with our condition and with our fortunes, of trouble and sorrow of all kinds, subsist far too much among christians, to allow us to believe that these perceptions and feelings are general and vivid. But what avails it to be fortunate, and to have the greatest advantages over others, unless we know and feel and prize our good hap? if we make little or no use, or at least no worthy and cheerful

ful use of the advantages we possess? — To this subject, my pious hearers, I have already sometimes called your attention, and particularly on such solemn days as the present. Allow me to do it also to-day. There are no better means for perceiving and feeling the value of the faith and the other advantages we have, than by representing to ourselves the reverse of the medal, the want of this happiness and of these advantages, and by comparing the difference of our condition in the one and the other predicament. Thus, the lively representation of what pain and sickness are, makes us thoroughly sensible to the value of health; thus likewise the sight of a dejected, melancholy man; causes us to feel the entire value of a brisk and cheerful disposition. Let us employ the self-same means in order more clearly to perceive and more intimately to feel the true value of christianity, the magnitude of the happiness for which we are indebted to Jesus, the saviour and deliverer, come into the world. Let us therefore consider, what we probably should have been, if Jesus were not come into the world, and we were destitute of his doctrine and assistance; and compare it with what we at present are and may be, possessing as we do these helps.

Not more beautiful than just is the description in our text of the alteration that is effected
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in our condition by the coming of Jesus into the world, and the divine doctrine which he brought from heaven. By the tender mercy of our God, the day-spring from on high, the true celestial light, the great preacher of righteousness and truth, has appeared among us ; and has dispersed the thick darkness, the clouds of ignorance which depressed and misguided the race of mortals, and has conducted them on the way of peace, on the path of happiness.

What then should we have been, without the splendour of this light, without the lessons of this teacher ? And what are we become through them ?

In the first place, we should have been ignorant: ignorant on points of the last importance, topics in the knowledge whereof all considerate persons must be most deeply concerned ! Ignorant as to God, and to his will, his relations to us, and the best method of honouring him and of assuring ourselves of his good pleasure ; ignorant as to the road that leads to real perfection and happiness ; ignorant as to the means whereby a guilty creature may regain the favour of his creator and judge, and a creature enervated and depraved by sin, may again become sound and felicitous ; ignorant as to the portion that awaits us after death. Thus ignorant were the heathen, unenlightened by the day-spring from on high, even without except-

ing the majority of their philosophers and sages. Darkness covered the earth, and thick darkness the people. Though their knowledge and skill in other things might be ever so great and various; how limited, how defective, how inadequate were their conceptions of God, of religion, of the destination and the duties of man, of the grounds of our comfort and our hope with regard both to the present and the future! How general and how gross was the ignorance and its concomitant uncertainty and indifference and carelessness, in which they lived with reference to these their most important concerns! — Now, that christianity has dispelled that darkness among us, now we are instructed on all these topics, and the unlearned as well as the learned, the lowest of the people as well as their guides, are enabled to form of them, perspicuous, just and satisfactory conceptions fully adequate to the tranquillizing of their hearts and to the prudent direction of their conduct. Now we know God, and know him as the creator and governour of the world, as the father of mankind. Now we know his gracious dispositions towards us, and can presume to meditate upon him without servile dread, with filial confidence. Now we are no longer terrified and confounded at the immense interval between him and us; for Jesus, who is at once the son of God and the son of man, has in a manner filled it up, made us more acquainted

acquainted with the deity and brought us nearer to him. Now we know how we are to worship God in the way most acceptable to him, how we may secure his favour, and even when we have sinned, obtain pardon and forgiveness from him. Now we know to what we are appointed both in the present and the future world, what we have to hope and to expect here and hereafter, and in what way we may attain to the summit of our perfection and happiness. And what important, necessary, indispensable knowledge is this to the man who is studying to raise himself above the objects of sense and to feel and employ the faculties of his mind! What light, what comfort, must it spread upon all that he thinks and sees and does and whatever befalls him!

Yet without the assistance of this light arisen upon the world, we should not only be ignorant of the most interesting objects, but we should probably entertain the grossest, absurdest errors concerning them. We should in all likelihood be polytheists, idolators, immersed in superstition; giving that glory to the creatures which belongs only to the creator; living in perpetual alarms, in consternation and terror; degrading ourselves, and belying the dignity of our nature, by vain and frivolous rites and senseless observances, by servile sentiments and sordid actions. Such

were the heathens, such were our progenitors ; and who will certify us, that we, their posterity, should have been more fortunate ? But, perhaps it may be said, that idolatry and superstition would have declined by its own palpable stupidity ; the vileness, the inconsistency, the absurdity of it would have been gradually exposed, and it would have at length appeared to mankind in its native form. The slavish shackles, too heavy for them to bear, with which it held them bound, would at length have excited their resentment, and supplied them with courage and force to break them in pieces and to set themselves at liberty. Among the Greeks and Romans the empire of superstition was already on the decline, already it might be ridiculed without animadversion, when the light of christianity arose, and stigmatized it with indelible infamy. Perhaps therefore we too might not for ever have remained the slaves of superstition and idolatry. Yet, with men left entirely to themselves, how tardy the progress from the avoidance of superstition to the knowledge of salutary truth ! What indirect and devious turnings, what labyrinths lie between them ! How long may they wander in those and be intangled in these, ere they come to clear light, to tranquillizing certainty ! Have they escaped the dangers of gross error and superstition ; yet the not inferior dangers of incredulity

dulity and doubt await them. This was the case with the enlightened part of the heathenish world at the promulgation of christianity. And that would probably have been the case with us, without this supernal assistance. But is not this a condition extremely doleful and wretched? Does not our virtue as well as our satisfaction and composure, every way suffer under it? How could we practice the former with cheerfulness and fortitude, and urge onward undismayed to higher perfection, if the goal to which it leads be concealed, and our destination doubtful? How can we effectually pacify our minds, while we know not on whom we and all things depend, to what purpose all that is and all that happens tends; if in the events and revolutions of the world and in the fortunes of men we one while, as sceptics, imagine we perceive design and wisdom and goodness, and at another believe them the mere sport of chance? How greatly then likewise in this respect are we beholden to christianity? Its light has dispelled those gross misconceptions, so dishonourable to mankind. Its power has banished idolatry and the more abominable kinds of superstition from a considerable part of the earth and also from our country. We can now worship the deity without superstitious dread in spirit and in truth. We know him, the true, the only God, and know him as the sum
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of all perfection, as the fountain of all happiness,
as him who merits our profoundest reverence,
our entire affection, our unreserved obedience,
our perfect confidence. The sources of the
most accurate knowledge of him and his will lie
open to us all ; we may all of us daily derive
light and certainty from them ; and guided by
this light, may happily avoid the two fatal rocks
of infidelity and scepticism. Christianity is in
truth for the generality of mankind the only,
and for all the safest preservative against those
diseases of the soul ; far safer than the elaborate
and subtle disquisitions of philosophy. Its di-
vine authority has done and still does that in
the world with thousands and thousands of its
confessors, which human wisdom, which medi-
tation and inquiry never, or extremely seldom
are able to effect. To the diligent investigator
of truth it facilitates research, preserves him im-
perceptibly from many deviations and errors,
very frequently, unperceived by him, directs his
judgment and adjusts his conclusions ; and con-
ducts those who have neither time nor capacity
for profound research, by a way both short and
safe, to the knowledge of truth and to the con-
viction of such truths as it is necessary and sa-
lutory for them to know.

Yet more ; without the help of christianity
we should probably not have proceeded so far
in the culture of the mind and manners ; per-
haps

haps we should be still in more than one respect, in the state of rudeness and barbarism, in which our fathers formerly were. I am well aware, that christianity, or rather the abuse of it, has at various times been more detrimental than favourable to human cultivation; but the greater progress of it, particularly in the primitive and the latter ages, without admitting its influence, is not easily to be accounted for. Even in the most flourishing periods of Greece and Rome, the culture of the mind was never so general amongst all classes and conditions of men; and it would certainly have been far less, had not their particular political constitution given their mind a peculiar impulse to the unfolding of its capacities and powers. And with all this, how seldom do we meet with any traces of reflection on moral and religious subjects! In what a deep, universal and deathlike lethargy in this respect was the human intellect immersed! And consider all those tribes and people among whom christianity is still unknown, or among whom the knowledge of it is extinct, where is there one, that with respect to intellectual cultivation, can be compared with christian, and especially with protestant nations? And how prominent too are these advantages! How fruitful in important results! Therefore, if formerly our progenitors permitted a few popular leaders to think for them, and to decide concerning

cerning truth and error, while they were interested and employed solely in animal pursuits ; if they were blindly led and absolutely governed by their druids and priests : yet we have been trained up from our infancy in habits of thinking, of thinking on moral and spiritual topics, on the most weighty concerns of man ; yet we learn to think and to judge for ourselves ; learn to acquire a taste for reflection, for the exercise of our intellectual faculties, and thus to gain both means and motives, for always more and more completely unfolding them. As christianity in its earlier periods first brought several nations to an acquaintance with letters, with the art of reading and writing, thus giving them the primary rudiments of civilization ; so has it in later times set the human intellect in vigorous and various movement, and is still, with very many, the principal cause and the best means of their greater progress in the sciences that adorn and elevate mankind.

Yet without the assistance of christianity, we should have still greater defects to fear. We should, fourthly, it is probable be still lying buried in the depths of moral corruption, still be the slaves of sin and iniquity. Were it not for the day-spring from on high, whose appearance in the world we now commemorate, probably the darkness, which also in this respect then covered the earth, would still have shrouded and deformed

deformed it on all sides. And how great, how universal, how dreadful, was that darkness ! With what unbounded sway did vice then reign among mankind, with all its ghastly retinue of folly and misery ! How anxiously must virtue have been forced to secrete herself from her fury ; and how extremely rare was that virtue ! How greatly were all the nobler powers of human nature relaxed, how contaminated all the sources of her intellectual superior vitality ! And so, my pious hearers, would they probably still have been. For all the revolutions that have since happened among the nations, in reference to political constitution, administration of government, laws, prevailing maxims and dispositions, seem not of such a nature as to have been able to check the universal corruption and to effect any considerable improvement in the human race, had not christianity kept the counterpoise to those corruptions, and amidst all revolutions shewn itself more or less operative to the best interests of mankind. If the patriotism that anciently reigned amongst the Greeks and Romans, could not prevent the still increasing declension of men and manners, by what means could it have been checked in after-ages when all vestiges of that powerful motive were vanished, when all governments were so arbitrary, so tyrannical, so despotic, when wars and revolutions succeeded each other without intermission,

sion, when so many tribes of barbarians thronged together from all sides, and were perpetually striving for the mastery? Granted, that from time to time some eminently wise and generous philanthropists would have laboured at the improvement of their brethren, would they, think ye, have succeeded better than those sages of the ancient world, who though they had indeed their particular disciples, could never have become the actual reformers of the age they lived in? Would they, think ye, have succeeded better than the philosophers in our days, even guided as they have been by christianity on the track of truth, who yet have not been able to effect or to present us with something that might be a substitute for it.

No; probably we should all, or the greatest part of us, have been still the slaves of our lusts and passions, in bondage to vice. Whence, without the light and the power of religion, whence should we derive the courage and the strength to lay restraints on ourselves, to elevate our understanding and dignify our affections? Where find a safe rule for our conduct, where fixed, infallible principles sanctioned by competent authority? How come at the exalted idea of human and christian perfection? Whereby should we be stimulated to strive at its attainment, and be kept intrepid in the struggle? But what a misery, what a degradation is it, to
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be the slave of wickedness and vice, the sport of our lusts and passions ; always to live at variance with ourselves and with others ; always resolving and never able to perform, always purposing and never doing ; panting and striving for happiness, and yet never to attain it !

Now, my pious hearers, it is our fault if we are still slaves, if we remain ignorant and regardless of the noblest liberty, if we neither apprehend nor experience the whole value, the whole felicity of virtue. Christianity shews her to us in her most lovely form, in the sublimest model. It points out to us the direct road to that glorious object, holds out to us the strongest motives, and furnishes us with the best means to pursue it with constancy, and infallibly to reach it. Jesus, our leader and precursor, stands before us as the grand exemplar of human perfection ; and what incentive is wanting to us to follow, and constantly more to resemble him, as his disciples, as his redeemed, as his subjects, as his friends, as the future partners of his glory ! And how many thousands and thousands have by this means been rendered truly virtuous ! And how many are there still, and still rejoicing in their virtue, and still shining as lights of the world, and acting as the salt of the earth ! Yes, how many of you likewise in this respect have experienced and still experience the power of christianity !

Think

Think of the generous, manly and devout sentiments it so often awakens and confirms in your breasts; think of the conquests you have, more than once, encouraged by christianity, gained over yourselves and over temptation to sin, think on the many good endeavours and acts to which it has afforded you courage and strength, on the many beneficent, public-spirited exertions to which it has excited you: and thence judge how greatly in all these respects you are beholden to it.

And what happy changes are likewise these, my dear friends! What a quite different being is the virtuous from the vicious man, the free-man from the slave! What a quite different sentiment of his dignity has the former from the latter! What totally different pleasures and felicities they enjoy! The former walks in light, the latter in darkness: the former rejoices in the noblest liberty, the latter groans beneath the yoke of bondage: in the state of the former regularity and harmony prevail, in the state of the latter incoherence and disorder: the one has the real enjoyment of life, and is progressively approximating his superior destination; while the other is ever rambling farther from it, and the purest, noblest satisfactions of life are utterly unknown to him.

This is not all. Without the influence of the heavenly light, which by the tender mercy of
 God,

God, has visited our dark abodes, we like our pagan ancestors should have been deficient in comfort and resignation in afflictions, in hope and affiance in God. We should have known no better than they, towards whom to turn, to what deity we should apply, where to look for aid to find protection and assistance and support, and by what ceremonies, by what rites and sacrifices they might be obtained.

Our only consolation would have been the sentiment of an inexorable necessity, or the submission to a blind, inevitable fate. And what a miserable solace is that! Will it give our sufferings a different aspect? Will it present them to us on a more agreeable, or a less terrific side? Will it allow us to hope for any benefit from the patient endurance of them? And how could we extricate ourselves from the labyrinth of human destinies? How enucleate the enigma of our own? What darkness would envelope all that is and happens, what befalls ourselves and others, if the doctrines of christianity were still hid from our eyes!—That darkness is now dispelled amongst us, and our disconsolateness with it. Sources of pacification and comfort no less pure than abundant and exhaustless, now disclose themselves around us. The sentiment of a sovereign being, consummate in wisdom and goodness, that rules and governs all things; the sentiment of a heavenly

venly father, who owns us for his children, who cares for us, loves us, and designs and promotes nought except happiness; the sentiment of an omnipotent and omnipresent God, who is never far from us, never unmindful of us, promises and affords us protection and support, who is ever ready and ever able to assist us; the sentiment of a future state, which will unravel all, shed light upon all, dissolve all seeming inconsistency and confusion into perfect harmony, convert all misery into happiness, and approximate all to its proper end and perfection: what sources of comfort and tranquillity are these! And what but christianity has opened them to us? What invites us daily to the use of them, and what renews them to us daily, but christianity? And how many thousand souls have already here found refreshment and renovation; and how many still daily, parched by trials in the furnace of affliction, slake their thirst at these ever-springing, never-failing rivulets of life!

Finally, without the light that has visited us from on high, our apprehensions and our faith concerning immortality and the future state of retribution, would be as dubious, as obscure, as fluctuating as they formerly were among mankind, and as they still for the most part are among the people that are not enlightened by christianity. Some traditions, indeed, a sort of popular

popular belief about these matters, would always have operated more or less amongst mankind, and even effected some good. But what a strange mixture of truth and error, have these traditions, this popular belief at all times been? How little influence had they, and could they have on the morality of mankind! How easily might they lose their credibility in the mind of the thoughtful inquirer! And with what numbers had they in fact entirely lost it! But what is man without these convictions, without this belief? What a poor, deplorable and wretched creature! How must all perplex him, the past, the present, and the future! How enigmatical must the present life be to him, how inexplorable his destination, how terrible the stroke of death, how tremendous the consequents of it! At every step to be drawing nearer to annihilation, or to die in uncertainty whether or not he entirely ceases to be, how burdensome, how bitter must this render life and death to the thinking man! How oft must he be tempted to envy the lot of the beasts of the field, who, unconcerned and blithe, enjoy the present, and are unable to speculate on the future!

But now, my dear brethren, that we are christians, this darkness needs no more dismay us. Now are life and immortality brought to light through Christ, the day-spring from on high. Now death is despoiled of its power,
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and the grave of its dominion ! Now we know for certain, that we shall not entirely, that we shall not eternally die ; that we shall continue to live, and continually become more perfect and happy from everlasting to everlasting. Now we can calmly and securely pursue our course, as certain whither we go, and knowing the prize, the glorious prize to which christian virtue leads. Now we can live cheerfully and die contentedly ; for this life is only the commencement, the first period of our existence, and death is not the end of our being, it is only the passage to a better, a superior life.

Oh blessed, for ever blessed be the tender mercy of our God, which caused this radiant light to visit us, which has dispelled the tremendous darkness in which our fathers sat and sighed, and guided our feet into the way of peace and happiness ! Blessed, for ever blessed, be he who came to us in the name of the Father, and brought us this light, this comfort, this hope, from heaven to our earth, from heaven into our hearts ! Oh happy we, that we are christians ! Now, not ignorant, not superstitious, like the heathens, not idolaters, not the thralls of vice, not totally sensual, comfortless, hopeless, like them ! No ; the truth has enlightened us : we are informed of our highest interests, and can rest perfectly satisfied in that information ; we know and venerate the only true

true God, and Jesus Christ, whom he has sent ; our mind is fortified and elevated, our understanding can act with freedom ; we are actuated by nobler principles ; we have received new excitements, new abilities to virtue, for us is prepared comfort in afflictions and hope in death. Oh let us rejoice in it, my christian hearers, be sensible to the full value of our happiness, and praise God for it, and his son Jesus Christ, not only this day, this festive day, but every day of our lives ! And that this joy may be increasingly more solid and complete, let us all endeavour to be, to become, to have, to do, to enjoy, only what christians always may and should be and become and have and do and enjoy. And how much does this comprehend, how glorious is the vocation, how grand the appointment of the christian ; how eminently wise and good and blissful, may he as a christian be and become ! Yes, may the true, vivifying spirit of christianity, continually more and more pervade and actuate us ; the spirit of filial love to God, of cheerful hope and confidence in him, the spirit of cordial brotherly love to all mankind ; the gentle, meek, resigned, contented, patient spirit, readily sacrificing itself for the benefit of others, which animated Jesus ; the noble, heavenly temper that sought and esteemed internal perfection more than outward privileges, that continually reminds us of our superior destination,

nation, and continually makes it important in our sight, and teaches us to regard, to use, to do and suffer all things as means and way to it: yes, may this mind, this spirit take entire possession of our hearts, and display itself in all our words and works! Then, and only then, shall we feel the full value of christianity, and be the best and happiest among the good and happy! Amen.

Christmas-Day.

SERMON IX.

The Holy Supper, a social Feast.

GOD, to what dignity thou hast preferred us as christians ! To what perfection and felicity hast thou invited us ! To be thy children, thy eminently beloved and favoured children ; to be brethren and sisters of Jesus thy first-born son ; to be designed for immortality, for a blessed immortality ; to have communion with thee our father, and with thy son, our saviour ; to be so intimately associated with all thy worshipers in heaven and on earth ; and here before thee to rejoice unitedly in all these benefits and to be assured of them afresh : what honour, what happiness, what felicity ! Lord, what is man, that thou so regardest him, and the son of man, that thou art thus mindful of him ! Where shall we find words, how excite sentiments for celebrating worthily thy praise ? Yes, adoration and thanksgiving and glory be ascribed to thee, the Eternal, the Infinite, to thee, the Gracious and Merciful, for that thou hast raised us from

the depth of our weakness and our misery, to thee, brought us to the knowledge of thee, vouchsafed us thy grace and love, and rendered us capable of correspondence with thee ! Adoration and thanksgiving and glory be to thee, the Son of the Father, to thee, our Deliverer and Saviour, to thee, who hast revealed to us the Invisible, opened to us access to the Father, smoothed to us the road of happiness and virtue, raised and ennobled our nature when it was enervated and degraded by sin, and so intimately and indissolubly united all that thou art and hast with us and our eternal welfare ! Oh that our whole lives might be one continued act of thanksgiving and love and sacred joy ! Oh that these sentiments might even now entirely pervade our hearts and animate them in a superior degree ! Do thou, therefore, Author of the universe and of all this good to man, send forth thy light and thy truth, that they may enlighten and lead us, transpierce and vivify us all with a fervent love of thee and of our lord Jesus, kindle in us a sincere and perfect love for all mankind our brethren, and shew us prospects in a better world which may inspire us with comfort and never-failing joy ! Bless to that end our present reflections on these sublime doctrines of christianity, and cause us to experience the effects of thy nearer presence, the influences of thy holy spirit in an abundant measure.

measure. In humble regination to thy will, and in the name of Jesus Christ, our lord, and in full reliance on his promises, we present our petitions at the footstool of thy eternal throne, concluding them in his own comprehensive words: Our father, &c.

I JOHN i. 3.

That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his son Jesus Christ.

IF ever any religious solemnity can be capable of occupying entirely the heart and mind of man, and both of them in the most agreeable and delightful manner, it is certainly that of the holy supper. Whether we consider it as a public declaration of our faith, of our hope, of our christian sentiments, or as a memorial of the love of God and of his son, our lord and saviour, or as a solemn commemoration of the innocent and salutary death of Jesus and his infinite merits in behalf of mankind, or as a bond of union with him and with all his sincere votaries, or in short as a communion, as a social feast: how much matter for thought and sensibility, how much excitement to gratitude and joy do we find in it! What devout sentiments, what pious resolutions, must it beget and confirm in us! Oh may we experience this at present, my dear friends, when we are preparing to celebrate this solemn

solemn act of worship ! May our mind and our heart be so entirely occupied with it, that we may be thoroughly sensible to the dignity and blessedness of christianity. In this view let us now consider the holy supper as a social feast. As the apostle John in our text addresses the christians, in reference to the christian doctrine in general : that which we have seen and heard, declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us : and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his son Jesus Christ ; so may we address you with regard to this sacred act in particular : all whereof it reminds us and whereof it assures us, all that we here see and do, is, that ye may have fellowship with us and we with you ; and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his son Jesus Christ.

Yes, my devout hearers, here we have fellowship with God, our father ; fellowship with Jesus, our saviour and lord ; fellowship with all christians, our brethren, fellowship with the just men made perfect, with those superior spirits, who, in a better world, await us as the future partners in their felicity. And what is more worthy of our reflections, what promises us greater comfort and joy, what elevates our mind to nobler expectations, what pervades our heart with more blissful emotions, what can better gratify our desires and wishes, than this fellowship with God, the creator and governour

of

of the world, with his son and vicegerent Jesus, and with all the wise, the good, the blessed inhabitants of his kingdom ?

Here, my pious audience, we have in the first place, fellowship with God, the first, the greatest, the best, the most perfect of beings, the author and preserver of all existences, the original fountain of life, of light, of happiness. We know him, the True, the Only, the Eternal, and know that we are in the closest and blesseddest connections with him. He, the Concealed, who dwells in light to which no man can approach, has revealed himself to us by his son, by his confident, by his express likeness. By him the Invisible is become in some sort visible, the Incomprehensible conceivable. We know him as the Father, as our father, and here in his house we assemble with a part of his family on earth, and rejoice together and glory in being his children. No anxious, servile dread deters us from approaching his throne ; the sentiment of his inspection and presence is not alarming to us ; it is our solace and joy. For us the way to him lies clear, his son himself has opened and prepared it for us, through him we have free, unimpeded access to God, and the immense interval between him and us, is as it were filled up by this exalted mediator, at once the son of God and the son of man. We, who were afar off, are brought
nigh

nigh to him, are adopted into his family, and here he admits us as it were to his table, and allows us to enjoy the complete happiness of being children of such a father. — And in fact, what a gracious, merciful, kind, beneficent parent we have in him ! A father, who receives his prodigal, undutiful, guilty children, with more than parental tenderness, who sends his son, his only-begotten, from heaven to them, and for their sakes spares not his son, his only-begotten, that he may reclaim them from their deviations, rescue them from their distress, and conduct them on the paths of virtue and happiness ; a father who deals not with us after our sins, neither rewards us according to our iniquities, who forgives sins and remits punishment, overlooks a thousand errors and infirmities in his children, and governs them with the utmost clemency and compassion ; a father who is never far from us, who is constantly nigh to us with his protection and assistance, sees all our sorrows, hears all our sighs, and hearkens to all our petitions, if his wiser providence judges that a compliance with them would be salutary to us ; a father who recreates and blesses us daily with numberless benefits and comforts, and would render us capable of even greater benefits and superior joys ; a father, who is love itself, pure love, intends and promotes our real happiness, and under whose conduct and guidance

dance we shall proceed everlastingly from one degree of perfection to another, from one stage of happiness to another, shall be ever approaching nearer to him, having progressively more fellowship with him ! Oh happy we, my dear friends, thrice happy we in thus knowing God, in standing in such relations to him, in being so strictly allied to him, from whom, by whom and to whom are all things, who is the eternal, inexhaustible fountain of light, of life, of joy, of happiness. — And for all this ought we not to come hither into his presence with thanksgiving, and shew ourselves glad in his bounties ? Should we not recognize and feel the honour, the happiness, the dignity of being the children of God ? Should we not prefer it to every other honour, every other happiness, every other dignity, however resplendent ? And should not that sentiment inspire us with peace, content, acquiescence and resignation ? Should it not fire us with zeal to render ourselves continually worthier of that honour and happiness, and, being children of God, to be his imitators also ? — Oh what can we not, what may we not, what should we not expect from such a God and father as this ! How confidently may we resign ourselves to his guidance and controul ! How freely flee for refuge to him in all our necessities and distress, and seek and find with him compassion and relief ! How undismayed and cheer-

cheerfully walk before his face, if our hearts condemn us not! How completely certified may we be, that he disposes all things to our benefit, that he will conduct us to our destination along every way however dark and dreary which he calls us to go! — And now while here at the table of our lord, every circumstance reminds us in an audible voice, that God is our father, we are his children, he loves us, he provides for us, he will constantly render us more perfect, render us everlastingly happy, and of this has he given us the most authentic assurance by the death of his son Jesus: what blissful emotions, what pure and transcendent joy must then pervade our hearts!

Here, in the holy supper, we have secondly fellowship with Jesus, our saviour and lord. Here we publicly and solemnly profess ourselves his scholars, his votaries, his subjects, his redeemed, his imitators, his people, his heritage. Here we publicly and solemnly honour him as the teacher of truth, as our deliverer from sin and death, as our captain and precursor on the road of virtue and happiness, as our lord and king, as the head of the community, by whom the Father governs all. Here we celebrate the commemoration of his blameless, his holy life, his divine course on earth, his magnanimous sacrifice for the best interests of his brethren; the commemoration of his victory
over

over death and the grave, the commemoration of his immortal merits in behalf of the whole human race. Here we rejoice in the relief, the especial benefits that he obtained for us, the light, the comfort, the hope, the assurance which he brought from heaven to earth, whereby he cheered and to his followers has actually dispelled the darkness of error, of doubt, of misery, of despondency, which, with all its horrors, sat so heavy on the poor race of mortals. Here we rejoice in the purer and superior felicity, which he has promised us hereafter, which he has prepared for us in his father's house, to which he has leveled and facilitated the way, and the possession whereof he has fully secured to us. Here we feel the dignity of our nature ennobled by him, the distinction of our proximate affinity to him, as our first-born brother, the entire value of the blessed relations and habits we stand in to him, and are glad that we are men, that we are christians, that we are the redeemed of the lord. Here we feel ourselves as intimately, as indissolubly conjoined, with him, as the members of the body are conjoined with the head. Thus have we fellowship with him, the beloved of the Father, his express image, his vicegerent, the confidant of his decrees, the lord of angels and of men. And how close, how firm, how comprehensive is this our fellowship with him ! — All that he did

did and suffered on earth, he did and suffered for us men and for our salvation. All that he is and has, he is and has and employs for our especial benefit. His privileges are the privileges of elevated humanity: his power and glory, means for protecting, for governing, for improving, for blessing his redeemed. His kingdom is the kingdom of truth, of virtue, of liberty, of spiritual joy, into which he has transplanted us, and the privileges whereof we daily enjoy. His regained life, superior, divine, is the ground and pledge of our everlasting life. His conquests are our conquests; and our interests are his interests. Our happiness is as dear to him as his own, and his happiness will hereafter be our's. Now his spirit lives and operates in us, teaches us to be like minded with him, and so to walk as he also walked, renders us perpetually more like and conformable to him, and thus continually more capable of entering hereafter into still closer habitudes and of dwelling everlastingly with him. — And what else is the communion of our lord, which we here celebrate, to sincere christians, than the solemn ratification, the social enjoyment of these privileges and blessings? The bread that we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? The cup of thanksgiving with which we give thanks, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ, the blood of the new covenant,

which

which he shed for the forgiveness of sins? Are not all the privileges which his innocent, magnanimous sufferings and death procured to the human race, our's? Is not his death our life? Are we not all dead with him, with him buried, with him risen again, with him partakers of a divine nature? Are not our destinies intimately blended with his? — Oh, my dear friends, who of us is so cold, so insensible, so little of a christian, as not to feel the felicity of such a connection with Jesus, as not to rejoice in it! How contentedly and securely must he walk, who has such a forerunner and guide! How piously and happily must he live, who lives under such a ruler and king! What harm, what misery has he to dread, whom Jesus has redeemed, whom he has set at liberty, to whom he has opened heaven and the paternal heart of God! What must he not be able to do, what may not he expect, who is so one with Christ, and through him one with God, as the Father and the Son are one together! What light, what force, what felicity must devolve from him, the head, on all his members, and be transfused throughout their soul! Yes, rejoice in this, all ye who justly bear the name of christians; and while ye here are eating of the bread and drinking of the cup, which the lord invites you to partake of at his table, it should be to you an earnest and pledge of his intimate,

intimate, cordial friendship and affection ; this sentiment should arise in your breast : I belong to Jesus, I am of his redeemed, am everlastingly connected with him, stand under his peculiar care and inspection and shall hereafter live with him for ever ; this sentiment should cause you to feel the whole dignity and felicity of christianity, and entirely penetrate you with gratitude, with love, with devotion to the founder of it.

Here my pious hearers, we have thirdly communion with all our fellow-christians, them that are nigh and them that are afar off, known and unknown, to whatever country they belong, and how far so ever they may dissent from us in opinions and rites. As it is one bread, says the apostle, of which we here eat, so are we all one body, as we are all partakers of one bread. Here we forget whatever adventitiously divides mankind and christians, and recollect and rejoice in only what they all have in common, and what links them the most closely together. Station, rank, wealth, power, temporal consequence here vanish from our view, and human dignity, christian dignity, common wants and benefits, common relations and habitudes to God and Jesus, the sentiment of one and the same high destination and the hope of one and the same happiness assume their place. — Yes, my pious audience, here we all meet as members of one family in the house

house of our common celestial father, and for commemorating the parting supper of his son, our first-born brother. Here we publicly declare ourselves to be brethren and sisters. Here we draw nigh under the liveliest sense of our weakness and indigence to the throne of grace, to ask a supply of help and strength from God. Here we confess Jesus for our master and lord, boast of our interest in him and the salvation wrought by him, and bring to him with one accord the offering of joy and gratitude which we owe to him as our deliverer. His generous love to us and the enjoyment of our common happiness acquired by him penetrate our hearts with affection for all our brethren of mankind. Yes, we love all them that love our lord Jesus Christ, and who are beloved of him. Dear and estimable as they all were and still are to him, so dear and estimable should they also be to us. Much as he did, bore, suffered, sacrificed for them, so readily should we also labour, bear, suffer, live for our brethren. None of all who belong to him and call themselves with us after his name, should be aliens to us, none find our hearts and our hands shut against them. No; we rejoice in all those who with us are redeemed, who with us are called to virtue and to glory, with us are pressing forward on the course to the mark of the prize of our high calling, and hereafter will partake with us in
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the honour and felicity which it holds out to us. — While therefore we here eat of his bread and drink of his cup, we in our hearts address each other thus : we are brothers, we are sisters, children of one father, subjects of one lord, members of one body, heirs of the same felicity ; all beloved of God, all redeemed by Jesus, all associated by the strongest bands of faith, of love, of hope. Far from us be any degree of envy, of hatred, of pride, all low self-interests ; whatever has a tendency to divide or separate us, to exacerbate us against each other, or cool and diminish the ardour of christian charity ! No ; with one heart and one mouth we will praise God our father, and Jesus our lord, rejoice together in their bounties, and so use and enjoy them as is most beneficial to all. Hand in hand will we proceed along the road of christian wisdom and virtue, throw no hindrances in the way of each other, but serve each to other as a support, as encouragement, as comfort. All our joys, all our sorrows, shall be joys and sorrows in common shared amongst us. Whatever has a tendency to promote the stricter alliance, the mutual concord and love of the whole family of our heavenly father on earth, whatever can knit more fitly together the members of the body of Jesus and render them more apt and expert in the maintenance and increase of this spiritual love, shall be our duty and happiness to accomplish.

Lastly,

Lastly, my pious hearers, we here have communion with the spirits of just men already made perfect, with all the votaries of God and Christ who have entered before us into the joy of their lord, and with the superior intelligences who in a better world are expecting us as the future companions in their felicity. For here in celebrating the commemoration of Jesus, we celebrate the festival of our own immortality. We keep the festival, not of one that is dead, but of one that is risen from the dead, of a living chieftain and lord, living in transcendent power and glory ; the festival of our leader and precursor into the celestial abodes, who once said to his people and also to us : Because I live, ye shall live also ; I go to prepare a place for you, where I am, there shall also my servant be ; I will come again, and receive you unto myself, that where I am, there ye may be also. Here we rejoice in these exalted hopes and congratulate ourselves on the glory that God has promised us through his son Jesus. If we be children, as it is written, then are we heirs, heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ. If we walk the way that Jesus walked, and persevere in it even unto the end, we shall attain the mark which he reached, and like him shall bear away the prize of fidelity, the crown of the conqueror. Here we are previously exercised in the generous heavenly dispositions, that fit us

for the society and converse of our brethren already made perfect, of beings of a superior order. Here we are employed, at least as probationers in the blessed occupations which they far more completely perform, mingle in spirit with their choir, join in their lofty hymns of praise, fall down on our faces with them before him who sits upon the throne, and before the lamb, and penetrated with gratitude and joy, with them exclaim : Worthy is the lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and strength and honour and glory and blessing ! Yes, blessing and honour and glory and power be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the lamb for ever and ever !

Thus, my pious hearers, thus have we as christians, as guests at the table of the lord, communion with God our father, communion with his son our saviour, communion with all christians our brethren, communion with superior spirits in the invisible world. Thus is the holy communion a social banquet. A fellowship, my dear friends, that must necessarily strengthen the weak, comfort the sorrowful, raise the fallen, encourage the faint-hearted, and certify those ~~that~~ are capable of happiness and are panting after it, of the infallible and complete possession of it. Oh cherish now this inestimable fellowship with all that is grand and sublime, that is venerable and amiable, that is beautiful

beautiful and good and desirable, cherish it by the devout and cheerful elevation of your minds and hearts to God and to Jesus, by a generous and liberal attachment to all mankind, by hopeful speculations in the future world; and there enjoy the whole felicity to which this fellowship entitles you. Rejoice in God as your father, and be thoroughly pacified in the sentiment and in the assurance of his infinite, inexhaustible parental love. Rejoice that ye belong to Jesus, that ye are redeemed by him from sin and bondage and death, and rely in full assurance on his promises. Rejoice in all your fellow-christians, as your brethren and sisters, and congratulate one another on account of your highly favoured and blessed condition. Rejoice in your immortality and your everlasting progress from one step of perfection and happiness to another. And then come and solemnize in such sentiments and dispositions the supper of our lord, and the communion of God and man, of heaven and earth. Yes, let us all say cordially to each other, we are children of God, the redeemed and friends of Jesus, we are all united by the ties of faith, of love, of hope, we are citizens of the better world, heirs of an everlasting felicity. As yet we cannot comprehend what we shall hereafter be; but this we know, and in this we will rejoice, that we shall be like him, our lord, that we shall see him as he is, and that our fel-

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lowship with him and with the Father, and with all the good and blessed inhabitants of his kingdom will be increasingly intimate, increasingly fertile in joy and bliss. Oh, my dear friends, if we believe and feel this, what can be wanting to our contentment and satisfaction! How virtuous, how holy will be our conduct, and how confident shall we be both in life and in death! Amen.

Communion.

SERMON X.

Retrospect of the past Year.

GOD, Eternal, Infinite, Immutable, the lord and father of our lives, with gratitude and joy, we thy children, are here assembled before thee. Let the sacrifice of praise we bring unto thee be acceptable in thy sight, and shower down new life and new blessings on us, thy frail and indigent creatures. Yes, thou hast spared us, with parental compassion during the year elapsed, conducted us through it, and brought us hither. Great and numberless are the manifestations we receive of thy providential favours; great and numberless the benefits, which as men and as christians, in nature and by religion, we obtain from thee; manifold and precious the satisfactions, the sensible, the spiritual, the religious comforts that we have enjoyed from one end of the year to the other. Thanksgiving and honour and praise be to thee for all, to thee the sovereign dispenser of joy, the inexhaustible fountain of light and happiness! If we have
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met with afflictions, thou hast taught us to bear them, alleviated the pressure of them, caused us to enjoy many refreshments under them and to derive various advantages from them. Yes, praised be thou even for those chastisements which thy fatherly hand has inflicted on us, and has conducted and still conducts to our welfare ! If we have done and promoted any good to ourselves and to others, that good has also come from thee, and was effected through thee. Praised be thou for all the abilities thou hast given us for the management of our business, for all the aids thou hast afforded us in the discharge of our duties. Yes, from thee, through thee and by thee are all things ; to thee be glory for ever ! Oh may the devout sentiments with which we consecrate to thee the firstlings of this year, animate us through the whole course of it ! What a year of comfort will it then be to our souls ! What failings and transgressions shall we then escape ! God, our hearts are now open to the salutary influences of thy truth. Let it make deep and permanent impressions on them, and accompany our discourse on the doctrines of religion with thy all-powerful grace and benediction. We implore these mercies of thee in full reliance on the promises made to us by Jesus, who, that we might be sure to ask aright, vouchsafed himself to teach us how to pray. Our father, &c.

PSALM CXIX. 59.

I thought on my ways.

WHEN the traveller has past a considerable part of his journey; on coming to a place where the road divides, where he must decline the course he has hitherto pursued and take another: nothing is more natural than to look about him, to cast an attentive glance or two on the way he has made, to compare it with that which still lies before him, and thence draw various inferences that either supply him with fresh hopes, or augment his sollicitudes.

To-day, my dear friends, we are precisely in the same situation with this traveller. A year, which is no inconsiderable portion of our short life on earth, a year, with all its businesses and pleasures and troubles, is left behind us; and another, with all the desirable and adverse occurrences and accidents it comprises, lies before us. Is it right that we take leave of the former and commence the present, without casting a serious look on both, without, as it is said in our text, thinking on our ways, the way we have already past, and that we have yet before us? Though one day be like another, though to-day is what yesterday was, each of itself a very small part of a whole uninterrupted series of days, which began at our birth, and ends at
our

our death : yet the wise man, the christian, will take advantage of every opportunity and every call to sober reflection ; and this opportunity and call he finds even in such a conjuncture as the present. He looks back on the past, and looks forward to the future. Two kinds of reflection and consideration, my pious hearers, to which I purpose, this day and to-morrow, by the divine assistance, to give you some directions. To-day the retrospect on the past year shall employ us ; to-morrow the prospect into that we have now begun.

The attentive retrospect of the elapsed year gives rise in the mind of a reflecting person to various important and comprehensive questions and considerations. The principal whereof are the following : What good have I enjoyed during that section of my life, and how have I enjoyed it ? What calamities and sufferings have I met with in it, and how have I sustained and improved them ? What affairs had I to transact, what duties to fulfil, and how have I transacted the one and fulfilled the other ? What faults have I committed, and how shall I beware of them in future ? What progress have I made on the road of christian wisdom and virtue ? What ought therefore the elapsed year to teach me with regard to the present ? Let us articulately propose to ourselves these six questions, and in the answers to them be no less impartial than attentive.

First

First question : What good have I enjoyed in the past year, and how have I enjoyed it? Though the thoughtless, the insensible, the discontented, the dissolute man may perceive but few traces of good behind him ; though he perhaps may murmur and complain because he could not accomplish his base designs, not execute his iniquitous attempts, not satisfy his passionate longings after honours, or authority, or riches, or ~~sensual delights~~ : yet the reflecting, well-disposed, grateful person, can find neither beginning nor end, when he thinks of summing up the amount of the goods and pleasures and benefits, that he has received and enjoyed, during so considerable a portion of his life. He everywhere finds himself surrounded by effects and tokens of the divine providence and love, as by the air that refreshes him and the sunshine that enlightens him. What day, what hour, what moment of the past year, in thought says he, was not a gift, an unmerited gift of my creator and father in heaven, and which of them all was destitute of his bounties, of his no less manifold than estimable and indispensable bounties? Was it not in him and by him that I lived and moved, that I felt and thought, that I was conscious of my life and often heartily glad in it, that I was able to use and employ my mental and corporeal faculties in a thousand ways, could effectuate so much that

that was good and useful to myself and others, and supply my personal wants? Was it not from his kind and liberal hand, that I daily received life and health, food and raiment, the convenient and agreeable as well as the necessary? Was it not his powerful protection that averted from me so many perils and misfortunes, and supported and strengthened my heart in those that overtook me, and helped me to conquer and surmount them? Was it not he who disposes and governs all things, that endowed me from time to time with spirit and vigour for useful occupations, and blessed and crowned with success so many of my works and enterprizes! — Was it not our common father in heaven, who caused me to find among his children on earth so much affection and assistance and comfort and support, and occasioned me so often in return to enjoy the pleasure of serving and relieving them? And how great the satisfaction I have had, from one end of the year to the other, whether in contemplating the beauties of nature under the open sky, or in social converse with my brethren, or in the quiet of domestic life, or in reflecting on truth and in searching it out, or in serious and rational exercises of devotion! How many bright, exhilarating days of the spring and the summer, how many recruiting hours of solitude
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and conversation, how much solid and pure enjoyment of nature and religion, of my existence and my faculties, does one such portion of my life present to my mind ! And how insensible, how ungrateful must I be, if in all these benefits I fail of recognizing the paternal tenderness of my God, and of rejoicing in them ! — But how have I received and enjoyed all this ? Have I received and enjoyed it under a sense of my entire dependence on the supreme being, with a steady regard to him, the fountain of life and energy, the giver of joy ? Have I received and enjoyed his bounties and gifts with prudent moderation, with a grateful and cheerful heart ? Did the enjoyment of his bounty excite me to an unreserved and willing obedience to all his commands, to the sedulous and faithful discharge of my duties, to an unwearied course of beneficence and charity ! Have I strove to do so much the more good, in proportion to the more good I enjoyed ? How deep must be my confusion if the prosperity I have enjoyed should have removed me farther from God, and misled me into wantonness, negligence and sin ! But how much more precious must every benefit of God received and enjoyed be to me, if it have brought me nearer to him, my benefactor, and made the impression on me which it ought to make !

Second

Second question: What afflictions have befallen me in the past year, and how have I borne them? Without sufferings of one kind or another a whole year of human life seldom or never passes. Every picture of it, however charming, is formed by a mixture of lights and shades, and the former are not unfrequently heightened by the latter. To be a man, as such to inhabit a frail earthly tabernacle, as such to dwell on earth and amongst other men, to have and use limited faculties, easily exhausted, and in the application of them always meeting with more or less opposition, and yet to remain free from all adversities, from all sufferings and pains, is manifestly contrary to the nature of man in his present state. But various is the measure of sufferings that overtake him in one or the other period of his life. It often happens, that a considerable series of his days glides silently and calmly along, when only light fleeting clouds disturb the serenity of his mind, and the gay prospects that lie before him. Frequently however in a certain period of time, disappointments follow on disappointments, misfortunes on misfortunes, one storm succeeds another, causing him more sensibly to feel the wretched condition of man and the vanity of all his temporal schemes and expectations. And this is a subject of reflection to the wise man, the ~~christian~~ the pastor a few serious

glances backward on the year elapsed. With what afflictions, says he to himself, with what sufferings is it marked? Were they of the usual, the ordinary, or of a less common and singular species? Sufferings of the mind, or sufferings of the body? Sufferings that I have brought on myself by my own imprudence and folly, and must consider as the punishment due to my transgressions; or sufferings which have befallen me without any blameable cause in myself, and which I may consider as the dispensations and judgments of God, as means of trial and discipline appointed by my father in heaven? What kinds of loss may I have suffered in the late year? Loss of goods, or loss of honour and respect, or loss of health and spirits, or loss of friends and relations? What kinds of pain have I felt? Pain originating in an emaciated body, or pain on account of unsuccessful enterprises and exertions, or pain because of faults and sins committed and their baneful effects, or pain arising from unexpected opposition and insuperable obstacles in the search of truth, in endeavouring to do good, in the application of my talents, or lastly pain, in consequence of parting with persons whom my soul loved, and by whom I was beloved in return? **And what proportion do these afflictions, these losses, these pains bear, when set against the satisfactions, accommodations and pleasures enjoyed,**

joyed, against profit and promotion? How far may those be outweighed by these, or these by those? And what remarkable, permanent alterations are produced by them in my outward or inward condition, with respect to my mind or to my body, or to my connections with others? — How have I, in fine, sustained those afflictions, borne those privations, endured those pains? With calm submission to God and his ever-gracious designs, or with murmurs and complaints against his administration and providence? With the fortitude of a man that has the command of his temper and is master of himself, or with the weakness of a child, who is terrified at every stroke and crushed beneath every burden? With the patience and resignation of a christian, who reveres God as his father, even when under his correction, or with the sturdy pride of an unbeliever and scorner of religion, who resists the chastisement of the Most High, and complains of suffering wrongfully? And am I, by those afflictions, by those losses, by those pains, become morally better or worse? Have they softened or hardened my heart? Have they brought me nearer to God, to my brethren, or removed me farther from them? Have they misled me into sullenness and dejection, ~~or roused me to collect and exert my forces?~~ Have they made the doctrines of religion, the exercises of piety and devotion, dearer

dearer and more interesting to me, or rendered me indifferent towards them? Am I grown wiser, better, more teachable, more devoted to God, more heavenly minded, in the school of affliction? Can I therefore contentedly and calmly look back on the sufferings I have gone through, and even with thankfulness for them to the great tutor of human life, as subordinate means whereby he advances my spiritual perfection, and conducts me nearer to the proper end of my being?

Third question: What affairs had I to transact in the year gone by, what duties to fulfil, and how have I executed those businesses, and fulfilled these duties? The man who understands the true design of his creation, and strives to attain it, is never in want of occupation, of a variety of important occupations; and most of the duties that are once incumbent on us are incumbent on us as long as we are men and members of society, as we are creature and subjects of God, as we are christians and heirs of immortality. Every year, as well as every day, ought to add to the sum of our useful labours and our faithfully accomplished duties. The greater this sum is in any particular period of our lives; so much the more have we gained in it, the more blessed and memorable it is to us. And also this the reflecting man brings into the account in his review of the elapsed year.

year. With what legitimate, honourable exertions; ~~he~~ interrogates himself, with what useful works is it marked? What use have I made in it of my capacities, of my faculties, of my talents and endowments, of the station I fill, of the office I hold, of the profession I follow, of my connections with others? What have I done or neglected to do, as a man, as a christian, as a spouse, as the head of a family, as a friend, as a brother, as a member of society? What have I contributed or omitted to promote the welfare of my family and the public interest? What is become of my time, of my property, of my faculties? Are they lost to me and to others; or are they still present in their effects and consequences, and so present that I need not be ashamed on their account and lament their loss? — And how have I carried on my business? How attended to my calling? Have I complied with my obligations? From ~~constraint~~ and with repugnance, or from inclination, and with pleasure? With negligence or with assiduity? From the mere thirst of lucre, or from obedience to the divine commands, and from the desire of being serviceable to my brethren? With devout conscientiousness, or with vain and selfish and avaricious views? Did I care and work for myself alone, or also for others? Was every duty sacred and inviolable to me, and did I prefer the discharge
of

of it to every outward emolument, every transient pleasure.

Fourth question: What faults have I committed in the last year, and how shall I guard myself against them in future? — Were they faults that had heretofore prevailed over me, constitutional and habitual failings; or such as were new to me, of which I was not wont to be guilty? Were they faults of the moment, into which I was suddenly betrayed, and of which I repented as soon as they were committed; or corrupt, perverse appetites and affections, which by insensible degrees got the better of my too easy heart, gradually ensnared my approbation or at least my consent, and at last caused me to do or to say what was not right? Did I stop short at the first false step, did I then confess my iniquity and seek by all means to repair the wrong; or did I allow the passion, did I allow false shame, to seduce me into other, perhaps grosser acts of sin? Did I stumble on the plain and beaten road, or on a particularly rugged and slippery path? Was I overcome in a hard, continued conflict, or without any struggle and resistance did I submit to the enemy, become a prey to my lusts? — And what was it that tempted me to these faults and transgressions? Was it the want of consideration and reflection, or omission of the duties of religion, neglect of prayer and exercises of devotion? Was it the

fear of man, or unseasonable complaisance, that made me act against my own conviction, or was it the company and the example of the thoughtless and licentious, that beguiled me and put me off my guard? Was it timidity and consternation, or pride and presumption, that occasioned me to stumble or caused me to fall? And how am I at present affected with regard to these faults committed? How do they now appear to me? Do I think of them with cold indifference, or does the recollection of them fill me with shame and compunction? Do I seek to excuse, to palliate, to extenuate, to forget them; or do I exert myself to repair them, and to free and cleanse myself always more completely from them? How shall they serve me as a caution for the future? What am I, in this respect to avoid? What am I to observe? How shall I regulate my behaviour more prudently and warily for the time to come?

Fifth question: What progress have I made in the year now elapsed on the way of christian wisdom and virtue? Have I gone forward or backward on it? Is it become easier or more troublesome to me to fulfil my duties, and to do that which is lawful and right? Are the doctrines of religion, meditations on God, converse with him and with myself, more familiar or more reserved and unwelcome than usual? Is my
heart

heart more or less attached to things earthly and visible? Is the empire of my reason over sensuality confirmed? Do I think and act in a more sedate, manly and liberal way? Am I less servilely addicted even to innocent sensual gratifications and amusements? Can I more easily dispense with them, more readily sacrifice them to my duty and the good of my neighbour? Is my taste for whatever is true, whatever is beautiful and good, strengthened and improved? Are the superior, intellectual gratifications, the pleasures of rational thought, the pleasures of justice and humanity, the pleasures of devotion, become dearer to me? Does it cost me less trouble to master myself, and to stem the wild torrent of a licentious age? Do I know of any such victories over myself and the world, obtained by me during the last year, such morally good exertions and actions, as do now and will perpetually soothe my mind? Have I at any particular time, on any particular occasion, acted truly like a man and a christian? Have I sacrificed anything of some value to my conscience or to integrity? Have I performed any truly beneficent or generous action, or afforded any considerable assistance, done any particular service to society? What day, and how many days of the last year are distinguished by such demonstrations of wisdom and virtue? — How have

I therefore gone through this part of my course? Have I more frequently or more rarely stumbled? Oftener or seldomer lost sight of the mark? Have I proceeded more quietly, more comfortably, more cheerfully, more courageously, on my way, than ever perhaps before? Have I turned less than usual out of the strait, the direct road, and been less frequently misled into oblique paths and deflections?

Sixth and last question; What then should the last year teach me with reference to the present? What use ought I to make of the experience acquired, in the future regulation of my conduct? Of what does it warn me, to what encourage and oblige me? Do not the satisfactions and pleasures I have enjoyed in the year now terminated, give me reason to expect, from the eternal, inexhaustible bounties of my Father and God, many satisfactions and pleasures in the year just now commenced? And should not that inspire me with courage and confidence in the prosecution of my journey through life? Do not the disappointments and sufferings that I may have experienced, call on me to be modest, humble, prudent, not to promise myself here on earth any complete uninterrupted success, but to be prepared to meet with many changes and chances? Have I not transferred several weighty affairs and duties from the last year to the present.

sent, and ought I not to be the more diligent in executing them every year, as my time glides more rapidly by, and my days are drawing nearer to an end? Am I yet at a great distance from the goal of christian perfection, and should not that redouble my ardour to make greater approaches in every successive period of my life? Does not all that, in the year now past, I have enjoyed, sustained, performed, experienced, call up in my breast such sentiments as these: God is supremely wise and supremely merciful; he so mingles the good and the bad, sorrows and joys, duties and abilities together as the welfare of his children requires, and the good has always a great preponderance over the bad. Dread therefore nothing really bad, expect always good and constantly the best from him, the All-bounteous. Enjoy his benefits with thankfulness and satisfaction, and live not in anxiety and fearful apprehension of the afflictions that may befall thee, for he will help thee to bear them, and transform them into benefits and blessings. Be thou only faithful to thy obligations. The more willingly, the more unremittingly, the more steadfastly thou answerest them, the more easy and agreeable will it become to thee. Do all that thou hast to do in thy station and calling diligently and cheerfully. Defer nothing from indolence to an uncertain futurity. Finish without delay what thou art
able

able to finish. Repair, compensate thy faults and negligences as speedily and as completely as thou canst. Beware of new errors and transgressions, which are always the more culpable and disgraceful the oftener they are repeated. Seize and employ on the other hand every opportunity of exercising thyself in wisdom and virtue, the more carefully, as they are apt to escape thee unobserved and unemployed ; and pursue thy course with the greater ardour, as at every step thou comest nearer to the goal. Happy they, who hearken to this instructive, warning, encouraging voice of the departed year, and derive lessons of wisdom from it !

Yes, my pious hearers, thus does the thoughtful man, the christian, think on his ways. Thus revise every portion of the road he has gone, with a keen and impartial eye. Thus he recalls the days of the elapsed year, causes them to pass in review before his mind, and takes himself to task for their use and enjoyment. Thus he habituates himself to connect the ~~past with~~ the present and with the future ; and derives from the former prudential rules of conduct respecting the latter.

Oh might we all do so, my dearest friends ! and begin, continue and complete the year we now set out upon, with such sentiments and occupations ! How guiltless, how serene and peaceful would it then flow on ! How blessed
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would it be to us! From my heart I wish you, my dearest friends, and all whose welfare is connected with ours, this inestimable blessing, and with it all other kinds of prosperity and happiness. Amen.

New Year's Day.

SERMON XI.

Prospect of the Year commenced.

GOD, sovereign ruler of the world, disposer and governour of all our destinies, to thee we owe every day, every hour of our lives, and from thee we expect the continuance of them in the present and in the future world. If our days on earth are extremely transient and uncertain: yet are they in thy hand, yet are they determined and appointed by thee, the All-wise, the Supremely-good; and the sentiment of thy providential care calms our hearts, and inspires us with confidence and resignation: for all that comes from thee is pure beneficence, and all that thou orderest and dost is right and expedient. When thou breathest into us the breath of life, thou givest us at the same time the capacity and the means for the blithe enjoyment of it. When thou deprivest us of this life, thou ledest us through the grave and gate of death into a better life, and there makest us capable of superior delights. Yes, to thee we confidently

dently resign the appointment and ordering of our future days. "Thou wilt prolong or abridge them, mark them by joys or by sorrows, as is most salutary to us, thy children. Might we only account them to be so important as they really are, and employ them to the ends for which thou hast granted them! Yes, Almighty Parent, this we repeat our resolves to do with the beginning of the present year, and may the apprehension of thy awful presence enable us to keep them sacred and inviolable! Oh may none of the ensuing days elapse without their proper employment and utility! May every one of them be marked with efforts and actions intrinsically honourable and well-pleasing unto thee! Confirm and strengthen us in these good dispositions, o Father of mercies, and let the considerations we shall now set forth be blessed to that end. Oh grant us the comfort of thy gracious help, and quicken us with the influences of thy holy spirit! With humble confidence in the promises of Christ, we sum up our petitions in his name and words: Our father, &c.

PSALM CXIX. 59.

I thought on my ways.

UNDOUBTEDLY it is an especial prerogative of man above all the other creatures of the earth,

earth, that he can think on the past as well as on the future, clearly represent to himself much of the former, foresee with greater or less accuracy much of the latter, distinguish both from the present, and compare them with it, and thus as it were multiply his existence. This also is a proof of his higher, his superterrestrial descent, and his intellectual faculty, totally distinct from the body, so closely confined by time and space. And happy the man who in such manner uses that noble, that divine faculty, as to learn wisdom from it and continually make nearer approaches to the perfection of which he is capable ! The present revolution of the year, my pious hearers, affords, as I yesterday observed, a very natural opportunity and excitement to the application and exercise of this faculty of recollection and foresight. We then feel with more than ordinary vivacity, that the present is only an instant, but most strictly coalesces with the past and with the future, and is determined both by that and by this, now in one manner and then in another. How important therefore must the several portions of our life be, as well as the whole, which is made up of them ! With what materials for reflection must this supply us ! Well then, my dearest friends, let us proceed to-day to work up these materials, as we yesterday began to do. Yesterday we turned a few attentive, serious glances
backward

backward upon the year just past. In that view and in the name of every reflecting person, I proposed six important questions. What good, thought I, have I enjoyed in the last year, and how did I enjoy it? What calamities and sufferings befell me, and how did I endure and improve them? What affairs had I to transact, what duties to fulfil, and how did I manage the former and acquit myself of the latter? What faults did I commit, and how shall I guard against them in future? What progress in that portion of time have I made on the way of wisdom and virtue? What then should the last year teach me with regard to the present? The more impartially we answered these questions to ourselves, the more keen and accurate will be our view into futurity, the more just our judgment of the days to come. And how shall we look at the new series of days we yesterday commenced? What may we, what should we expect from them? What says the prospect into the year now commenced; what does it teach, what does it enjoin us? The days, (thus all things address us) the days we see before us, are not less precarious than they are important: precarious as to their duration; precarious as to their quality: important as to the affairs and tasks they impose upon us; and important as to the consequences which these occupations and labours will have on ourselves and others.

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A two-fold prospect into the year commenced, which demands our utmost attention.

The days we see before us are precarious as to their duration. Who, that walks with open eyes and a discerning mind among his brethren of mankind, can for a moment doubt of this truth? What day, what hour of the year passes by, but thousands of every age, of both sexes, of every state of health, are carried off from the land of the living and transported into the realms of death? And who of us knows when his hour will come, when the days of his life on earth shall be brought to an end? Perhaps therefore we may live through the whole of the year now begun; perhaps however only a greater or smaller part of it, perhaps only a few months, only a few weeks, only a few days. Perhaps we are still far from the term of our earthly course; but perhaps we are come within a short distance of it. This is precisely known only to him who appointed us this term, and assigned us this course. How loudly then does it call to us, in accents so clear and distinct as not to be misapprehended: Boast not thyself, o man, boast not thyself of to-morrow, as though it were already here; trust not implicitly to days and seasons that are not in thy power; defer nothing of what thou canst now do and perform to an uncertain futurity. Reckon not on years and months to come, as though thou

thou wert sure of them. Indeed thou art not, like the thoughtless and entirely sensual man, to live and to provide solely for the present moment. Indeed thou shouldst frequently form plans, make provisions, undertake and begin businesses and works, that may require whole months, whole years, probably whole ages to complete. This is agreeable to thy state and thy connections with other things and persons; this elevates thy nature and thy destination far above the nature and destination of the beasts of the field; this is expressly the will of God, who by each of his children, provides for his whole family on earth, and, by the revolutions and works of every age, for the ages to come. Carry thy thoughts and thy labours then never so far into futurity. Comprehend with thy intellect and with thy faculties never so many things, which are not yet, and perhaps never will be. That can never turn to thy reproach. Only at the same time forget not thy dependance on God, thy fragility and the uncertainty of all thy projects and contrivances, all thy exertions and enterprises. Only ennoble these prospects and efforts by the sentiment that thou thinkest and livest, not only, not chiefly for thyself, but yet more for thy contemporaries, for thy posterity. Then will not even that be lost to thee which thou canst only contrive, only commence, but not execute and finish. Then wilt thou be
exhila-

exhilarated and rewarded by the reflection, that thou hast sown for others, wrought for others, smoothed the way for them, opened prospects before them, procured them means and encouragement to useful industry, and thereby promoted the happiness both of thy living and thy yet unborn brethren.

If the days which we see approaching in the year now begun, be precarious as to their duration, my pious hearers, they are just as precarious as to their quality. Little as we can foresee of their natural, physical quality, little as we are able with any certainty to know beforehand, whether the atmosphere will be clear or lowring, mild and genial, or boisterous and stormy, glowing with sunshine, or rainy and blackened with congregated clouds : just so little can we foresee the moral quality of the days to come ; just so little can we previously tell with certainty, whether they will bring with ~~them more~~ joys or more sorrows, more pleasures or more ~~troubles~~, more agreeable or ~~more~~ adverse events and ~~contingences~~. Good and bad, bright and gloomy days interchangeably succeed each other in human life as well as in nature. Those follow upon these, and these upon those. Generally however according to such laws, ~~that~~ we neither perceive the one nor the other, till they are actually come. So it was in the last year : so will it also be in the present.

Perhaps

Perhaps many agreeable and pleasant days in it are rolling towards us ; perhaps however, likewise many that will be marked with adverse events and melancholy catastrophes. Perhaps we shall prosecute our affairs with success, and our enterprises will be brought to a happy issue ; perhaps too we shall meet with insuperable obstacles, unconquerable difficulties, so as to oblige us to abandon our projects and designs. Perhaps we may rejoice in a confirmed and uninterrupted flow of health and spirits ; but perhaps likewise sigh under various pains and infirmities. Perhaps we may enjoy the comforts of domestic life, the happiness of love and friendship in undisturbed serenity : perhaps also we may be parted from those we love, by removals, by accidents, by their death or by our own, or the enjoyment of those felicities may be embittered by other crosses and disappointments, by troubles and vexations. Whether those, whether these ; when and in what measure those or these will happen ; whether the year we have now entered upon, like most of the years of life, will silently and unobservedly glide on, undistinguished from others either by its good or its bad contingences, or whether by particularly fortunate or by particularly unfortunate changes and chances it may be signalized from its sisters : all this is to us unknown ; all this is to us extremely uncertain ; all this the

sovereign

sovereign ruler of the world, who also governs our destinies, has, for wise and gracious purposes, concealed from our view. — And what do we learn from this uncertainty as to the good or bad quality of our future days? Does it not cry aloud in every wise man's ear: make use of thy health and thy faculties now whilst thou hast them, and apply them without delay and without reserve to the best and most interesting purposes. Thou knowest not how long thou shalt retain them unimpaired, how soon thou mayst lose them entirely or in part. Enjoy the good things of life, which heaven provides thee, and enjoy them with a cheerful heart; delay not the use and enjoyment of them to an uncertain futurity, and let thy brethren, who are as transitory as thyself, have now their share in them. Who can tell, how soon sickness, or misfortune, or death may deprive thee of thy goods or of thy friends? Be humble, be moderate in prosperity. Be not proud of thy riches, of thy consequence, of thy health, of thy strength, of thy understanding. The sun may soon become obscured by clouds, the fine summer's day may end in a storm no less tremendous than unexpected. Neither be dejected in adversity. It is just as inconstant, just as subject to vicissitude as prosperity. The violent tempest is succeeded by a gentle calm; the blackest sky often suddenly clears up, and its genial

genial influence revives and gladdens the way-worn traveller as much as he had before been alarmed at its gloomy aspect.

If the days which we see before us in the year now commenced, be on one side uncertain, yet on the other they are important to us and to our brethren. Important considering the works and affairs they give us to mind, and important as to the consequences which they will have to us and to others.

The coming days, I say, are important as to the occupations and affairs they bring upon us. How much have we, in the course of a year, to conceive, to do, to provide, to contrive, for ourselves and for others! What opportunities, what occasions, what incentives, what provocations to activity, to industry, to the exertion of our abilities, to the use of our talents and skill we find in it! And how rapidly do the hours, days, weeks, months flit by to the man who is intent upon some generous and worthy pursuit! Every day we awake to new duties and concerns, to new businesses and avocations. Every day we find fresh opposition to repel, fresh impediments and difficulties that stimulate, exercise and invigorate our faculties; and every day on which, from indolence and negligence, we fail to comply with the task, ~~be~~ lost to ourselves and to our brethren.

Yes, important are the days, o young man, which thou seest before thee on entering this year. They are days of discipline, of preparation for the business and pursuits of after-life. Days in which thou art to lay the foundation of thy own perfection and happiness, the foundation of rational and cheerful enjoyment of life ; days wherein thou art to qualify thyself as a useful member of domestic and civil society, an intelligent and upright husband, father, friend, teacher, magistrate, mechanic, artist, tradesman, merchant ; days in which it is thy business to sow good seed for the future reaping, in which thou art to gather and acquire a rich store of useful knowledge, of excellent aptnesses of thought and action. Oh be not deceived on the importance of the days of thy youth ! Be œconomical, be careful in the use of them. Waste them not in the riot of youthful lusts and follies ; not in idle and unprofitable, though otherwise respectable companies ; not in sensual, though innocent gratifications and amusements. Employ them all, these short, evanescent days of the freshness and elasticity of the mind, employ them all in the cultivation of thy understanding and thy heart, in the production and exercise of thy capacities and powers, in making the best preparation for the affairs of thy station and calling. Seek retirement, solitude, and withdraw betimes from the tumult of
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the world and its fallacious joys, if thou wouldst hereafter be truly useful in society, and cheerfully enjoy its better, its nobler satisfactions. The loss of the days of thy youth while thy feelings are tender and penetrable, will be irretrievable, and the careless, negligent employment of them will vex and punish thee through the remainder of thy life.

Important are the days which thou seest before thee on entering the present year, o thou that art arrived at manhood, in the full consciousness and enjoyment of all thy faculties. These are the days of thy greatest and best activity; the days in which thou canst and shouldst operate the farthest around thee, propagate the most good and be of the greatest utility; the days when society demands of thee the returns of those services it formerly lent thee, and remuneration for its manifold benefits; days when it is thy business to provide for thy dependents, for thy children, for thy countrymen, for thy posterity, and lay the groundwork of the welfare of many others; days that decide whether thou hast answered to thy obligations as a man and as a citizen, attained the proper end of thy being on earth, and led a life beneficial or injurious to the public. Oh let them not escape thee unemployed, these days of manly vigour and activity! Be and become and do in them, all that, in thy situation, in thy vocation, in thy several relations, thou art

able to be and to do and to become. Exert thy faculties, and be not weary in the employment of them. Seek not repose ere thou hast laboured, ask not for wages ere thou hast earned them. Require not to reap ere thou hast planted and sown. Think and act, neither like the young nor like the old, while in the flower of thy age. Sedate reflection and mature judgment should mark all thy steps, and useful employment all thy days.

Important are finally the days which thou seest before thee in the present newly commenced year, o thou who art already drawing near to the advanced, or to the highest stage of life. They are days that demand greater abstraction of mind, more earnest preparation for thy passage into the future world; days of riper wisdom, of more confirmed virtue, of exemplary goodness. Oh employ them to the ends for which they are granted thee by the author and preserver of thy life! Repair, supply, as far as thou art able, the defects, the imperfections, the negligences of thy former days. Do all the good thou canst, the more immediately as thy days and hours more quickly flit away, and the nearer they draw to their end. Communicate thy experiences to the inexperienced, caution them against thy transgressions and failings. Let thy example be a lesson to them, let the light of thy wisdom and virtue shine brightly round thee, teach the young and those of riper years,

years, what comfort, what felicity a good conscience and the review of a well-spent life procure mankind; and if thou hast taught them by thy conduct to lead a virtuous and christian life, go on to teach them now to expect with confidence the reward of virtue, and how undismayed to approach the grave.

The days we see approaching in the course of the year we have now begun, are likewise important with regard to the consequences they may and will have to us and to others, both in the present and in the future world. Though our days glide away so quickly and unobserved, yet various and great is the influence of each on our perfection and happiness. How inconsiderable soever a year of our life may appear in comparison of the whole amount, yet incalculable and viewless are the consequences it draws after it. He who loses a year by doing nothing or by doing ill, how great is his loss! Whoever gains a year by persevering industry, by the best use of his time and abilities, how great are his gains! Consider only the sum total of good or bad thoughts, desires, plans, efforts, actions, that accumulate in a year! How vast then must be the sum of good or bad, of useful or hurtful effects, that all these have on ourselves and others! How many cravings and desires may we excite and support in ourselves within the space of a year, which either elevate or degrade us, honour or disgrace us,

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sink us to a level with the brutes, or bring us nearer to the deity! How many words may we speak in a year that either gladden or afflict our brother, encourage or deject him, are edifying or injurious to him! How many actions may we perform in a year that either diffuse pleasure or displeasure, comfort or sorrow, misery or happiness around us, and which we ever after either recollect with satisfaction, or can never think on without shame and confusion! How closely concatenated are all that we think and say and do! How fruitful is often a sentiment, a desire, an action in a hundred other similar sentiments, desires and actions! And then how intimate is the connection in which we all stand towards each other, and how manifold the influence that one has on the other! How rarely can we say or do anything that does not operate more or less on others, and how little is it generally in our power to recall what we have said or done that was bad or hurtful, and prevent the consequences of it from operating clandestinely for ever! To conclude, what influence must our present behaviour have upon our future lot, our life on earth on our life beyond the grave, since this is a continuation and retribution of the former! Does it not call to us with an audible voice: Be vigilant over thyself, set a watch over all thy thoughts and desires, thy discourses and actions. Be careful to prevent the

the intrusion of a single thought that might hereafter pain thy recollection. Deem nothing indifferent that renders thyself or others in any respect more discreet or more careless, better or worse, happier or unhappier ; nothing that may at any time bring thee, in the present or in the future world, joy or sorrow, glory or shame. Judge of the days, the hours, that are flowing towards thee, judge of their value and importance, not merely by what thou dost or dost not on those days, in those hours, but by what consequences this doing and not doing may probably be attended in all future times. In whatever thou purposest and dost, be sure to connect the present with the future, thy conduct with the account thou art one day to give of it, thy state of discipline with the state of retribution that awaits thee.

Yes, my dearest friends, so will we look at the approaching days of the year now commenced. Their uncertainty shall teach us humility and prudence, their importance shall render us active and industrious. Thus will none of them escape us unused and unenjoyed. Thus shall we lose none of them entirely and for ever, Thus shall we spend them all conformably with our destination and the will of God, and hereafter reap from them, in a better life, a life subject to fewer vicissitudes, a harvest of undecaying fruits. Amen.

New-year.

SERMON XII.

Justification of Divine Providence, with regard to the terrestrial Welfare of the Impious and the Pious.

GOD, we most humbly adore thee as the sovereign ruler of the world, as the protector and father of all thy creatures. Though all nature proclaims thee to be so, yet hast thou revealed thyself to us more clearly in this venerable, this endearing relation, by thy son Jesus. Yes, in thee we live and move and have our being. It is thou who impartest to every creature life and breath and all things; who allottest to each its place in thy kingdom, and determinest the number of its days on the earth. In thy wisdom thou knowest all our necessities, and by thy bounty suppliest all our wants. Thou knowest all our thoughts, hearest all our sighs, beholdest and judgest all our actions. Thy notice not the slightest wish of our hearts escapes; from thee even the most secret act is not concealed. All is light around thee and
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before thee, the night as well as the day, the darkness of the grave as well as the splendour of the sun. Thou art on all sides, where thou workest, and thou operatest in heaven and on the earth and in all deep places, in every faculty, in every mind, in every heart. Of thee, by thee and to thee are all things; to thee be glory for ever! — No, nothing is exempt from the superintendence and agency of thy providence and government, the small alike with the great, the parts no less than the whole. All is thy work; all equally present to thee; all linked together by intimate indissolvable relation, all perfect in its kind; all means conducive to the highest attainable perfection and happiness. Thou deckest every flower of the field with its varied bloom; thou feedest every bird that skims along the sky; not a sparrow falls to the ground without thy knowledge and without thy will. Thou supportest and guidest the reptile in the dust, as well as the sun in the firmament; the weakest child of man, the tenant of the earth, as well as the most exalted intelligences of heaven. — Yes, even we are thy children, even we are under thy inspection and government, humble as may be the station that we fill among thy rational creatures. Nothing, nothing can befall us unknown to thee, unappointed by thee, that is not a consequence of thy will. Thou humblest and thou exaltest,
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thou makest rich and makest poor, thou woundest and healest; thou bringest to the grave and out of it again. The very hairs of our head are all numbered by thee! All our fates and fortunes are decreed by thee as well as the destinies of all worlds; and all that thou orderest and dost is right and proper, is in every case the best. — Immense as is the plan, sublime as is the aim of thy government; so certainly will the one be executed and the other attained. Let the powers of nature seem ever so much at strife; let the appetites, the affections, the views, the endeavours of mankind cross and counteract each other ever so manifestly: thy counsel stands, thy will is done; all must at length promote thy designs, and every dissonance dissolve in harmony! — Thy thoughts indeed are not our thoughts, nor thy ways our ways. We see but a few paces before us, only an insignificant part of the whole. Thou surveyest and comprehendest all, with reference both to time and space, the possible as well as the actual, the remotest futurity as well as the longest past, the whole immeasurable chain of causes and results, all ages and all worlds! What we take to be ultimate ends, are often only distant means subservient to higher ends; what we are apt to regard as decisive decrees, as the solution of the ænigma, are but the gradual preparatives and previous dispositions to it;

it ; what seems to us evil, the preservative from far greater evils, or never failing sources of good. — In thee therefore will we ever trust, and through thy son Jesus invariably invoke thee as, Our father, &c.

PROV. XXIV. 19, 20.

Fret not thyself because of evil men ; neither be thou envious at the wicked. For there shall be no reward to the evil man ; the candle of the wicked shall be put out.

INCAPABLE as we are of forming adequate conceptions of the grandeur and perfection of God, how irrational and perverse is the pride that misleads mankind so far as to arraign the ways of his providence, and to imagine they discover egregious faults in his wise and righteous administration. Does not all nature proclaim, does not every creature, the worm as well as the angel, the grain or sand as well as the sun, exclaim with an audible voice : The greatness of our creator is inexpressible, and his understanding infinite ? He embraces all ; he sees through all at once ; what may be, what has been, what is, and what in all future ages will be. His thoughts are farther exalted above the thoughts of man, than the luminous conception of the chief of the angels exceeds the obscure ideas of the lowest reptile. And what says the arrangement we perceive in the whole creation ? What say the universal and invariable

riable laws, by which all nature moves and acts? Do not all lead us to this conclusion: the rules of the government of the Highest, the determining principles of his actions, are superlatively grand; they extend into infinity. The Omniscient acts not, like the short-sighted mortal, who sees nothing except what is just before his eyes. He surveys the whole, he produces the fairest harmony among all the parts of it, be the distance between them never so remote in time or space: and his views are to us, who see only so small a part of these immense dependencies, very frequently inscrutable. We should admire his ways and his works, adore his holy will, and contentedly rely upon his providence; but not presume to censure what we do not understand. The little we know of the kingdom and administration of God, may suffice to quiet our minds, and to render us happy; may suffice to furnish us with the loftiest conceptions of what is hid from our view. — Would man but pursue then at all times the equitable dictates of reason and religion; he would not so frequently sin against God by unjust complaints, he would not betray so much perverseness and imbecility in his judgments on the ways of providence. He would humbly acknowledge his ignorance, and not be ashamed of his bounded apprehension. But how does the purblind mortal act? He forgets that he is feeble,

feeble, an extremely limited creature, and thinks to sound all things with the line of his intellect. He dares to find fault with the works and the ways of heaven's eternal king, and discovers defects and imperfections in things that lie far beyond his contracted horizon. He compares the all-piercing intellect of God with his childish and visionary speculations. He understands neither the world nor himself, and prescribes rules of conduct to the lord of the universe. One while it is the constitution of nature that displeases him, and which he, the ignorant fool, would have constituted better. At another time certain occurrences happen to mankind, which he cannot explain, and therefore he deems them incongruous and unjust. He knows vicious and impious persons, who are in flourishing circumstances, whose plans succeed, who possess power and authority, and seem to know no want of anything. He perceives on the other hand many friends of virtue, living in meanness and poverty, sighing under the load of various tribulations, despised and ill-treated by all men. These occurrences seem not to accord with what he calls wisdom and justice; they are inconsistent with the conceptions he has formed of the government of the universe. He therefore charges the majesty of heaven with injustice, and murmurs against his providence. He forms derogatory notions of true virtue

virtue and piety. He denies their excellency and their utility, calls the veracity of the divine promises in question, and takes up the language of the sinners of old: What is the Almighty, that we should serve him? And what profit should we have if we pray unto him? The more indecent however, the more pernicious and criminal these thoughts may be; the more frequently even the sincere worshipers of God are disquieted and perplexed with similar doubts: the more necessary will it be to confute them with all diligence. I have therefore resolved to employ the present hour, under favour of the Most High, in solving these difficulties and in justifying the ways of his providence, as far as the insufficiency of our apprehension allows.

I will endeavour to do away the objection to the divine government, drawn from the unequal distribution of outward prosperity, and from the terrestrial successes of the impious. You will see, my friends, that the greatest part of the seeming force of this objection rests on the erroneous judgments we pass on the characters and fortunes of mankind. You will see with how much justice it is that Solomon admonishes the disciple of wisdom, in the sentence before us: Fret not thyself because of evil men, neither be thou envious at the wicked. For there shall be no reward to the evil man; the candle, or the happiness, of the wicked shall be put

put out. The following considerations and remarks will, I hope, sufficiently inform and convince you of it.

The first is this : We very frequently deceive ourselves in the judgments we form concerning the moral condition, that is, the good or ill quality of the heart and the conduct of our neighbour. We hold some men vicious, who yet are not so, and on the other hand ascribe to others a high degree of virtue and piety, who are nothing less than virtuous. It is no very easy matter, my friends, to form a just conception of the predominant feature in the character of an individual. You deceive yourselves, when you decide from some particular actions, concerning his temper and the rest of his conduct ; or if you consider his outward deportment, his words and looks, as signs that are always in correspondence with his real dispositions. We see no more than what passes before our eyes, what falls under our senses ; the secret springs and propensities of the human heart are only to be known by continued attention : in many cases they can only be discovered on some particular occasions, which but seldom present themselves, and are immediately over. What is more usual with us than to be misled by appearances, and to take dissimulation for truth and sincerity ? How often does vice put on the countenance of virtue, and oblige us, under that

that imposing mask to shew her the respect and honour which are only due to virtue! How ingenious are the passions in disguising themselves, and in concealing from us their malignant views, that they may compass them with greater success! The most brilliant actions are not unfrequently mere artful coverings to deceit and wickedness, for palliating the most shameful disorders, and blinding the eyes of the vulgar. That strenuous advocate for the rights of God and man has perhaps nothing more in view, with all his seemingly generous concern, than to satiate his ferocity, his rapacity, or his pride. The heart of that other, the affable, the courteous, the fascinating man, is full of bitterness and envy, and his far-famed liberality is only founded on the vain desire of displaying his adornments to others, and of obtaining their empty praise. In short, could we compare the thoughts and dispositions of men with their words and works; could we rightly ascertain the real motives and views of their demeanour at all times; we should very often be obliged to acknowledge, that, what is highly esteemed among men is abomination with God. On the other hand, my friends, the probity and piety of many a sincere christian remain at times too long unknown. His virtue makes no show, as he practises it in the contracted circle of his family, his friends and acquaintance, and seeks

no applause from men, but is satisfied with the good testimony of his conscience, which far exceeds all the approbation and praise of the world. He many times designedly conceals his noblest actions, and confers on his fellow-citizens the greatest benefits, without their knowledge. He serves God in secret, and avoids even the most distant appearance of hypocrisy. Allow, that with all this he may have some failings, which are very conspicuous, which he himself knows, disallows and combats, without being able to gain a complete victory over them. Envy sets herself at work to magnify these failings; report blazons them abroad; we ourselves have been witnesses of them. His estimable qualities, his really great merits, are unknown to us; and, from these particular failings, which he himself abominates, we draw a hasty conclusion of his whole character. So easily may we deceive ourselves, my friends, unless we use all possible precaution in judging of a man's temper and conduct. Leave therefore the definitive sentence on the value and merits of mortals to him alone who tries the heart and the reins. Complain not of the prosperity of any whom you suppose to be impious: you probably place numbers in that class, who belong to the friends of religion and virtue. Murmur not at the misfortunes they meet with, whom you number among the just: it is likely

there may be many of these who by no means deserve that name, and bear no more than the punishment due to their sins.

The second remark is this: Many appear to be prosperous, while we behold their circumstances only from afar off, and with a transient view: but their prosperity vanishes as soon as we examine it nearer; it loses at least the greatest part of its value by the manifold evils and hardships that are implicated with it. Be cautious then, my friends, how you trust to your senses, in rightly balancing and ascertaining the prosperity of any one. Their decision is very fallacious; they are easily dazzled by first appearances. — You envy the prosperity of some vicious rich man. He lives in the greatest abundance; he yearly increases his income, and possesses far more than he can ever expect to consume. Every man flatters him, and his opulence procures him influence and respect. It at the same time covers all his faults; it screens him from the public scorn, which otherwise he might certainly expect. **B**ut how far from enviable is all this in the sight of the wise, who consider it impartially! Would you form a proper estimate of his prosperity; count not only the gold he possesses; take into the reckoning the painful labour, the distressing uneasinesses, the anxious cares, attending the acquisition and the custody of his wealth; count the

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the sleepless nights his avarice causes him to pass, and the excruciating thoughts that arise from the fear of losing his hoards; lastly consider, that no treasure is able to soothe his soul, or to comfort him under the terrors of death: thus would you deem the rich man, whose heart is attached to the earth, a wretched slave, and his prosperity a grievous burden. — But you probably admire the splendour which surrounds that man of iniquity, and the authority that invests him. He possesses the smiles of the great and mighty of the earth; he is the favourite of princes; every one is a suitor for his favour, and on his looks depend the hopes and fears, the joys and sorrows, of the numerous train of his worshipers. But does he therefore deserve the appellation of a happy man? What labour and toil must it have cost him, before he rose to his present eminent station! How difficult is it for him to keep himself on that slippery pinnacle, and to avoid the snares which envy and malice are continually laying before his steps! What is more unstable and vain than his imaginary or real grandeur? A careless word, a venial slip, a mere accident, may deprive him of all this respect, and plunge him into the lowest contempt. His magnificence subsides far more quickly than it rose; and he, who to-day is admired or envied of all, may to-morrow be the object of biting scorn. — Lastly,

let the voluptuary make his appearance, and weigh his prosperity. He despises sordid covetousness, and is free from the fetters that bind the proud. He does what delights his heart, and is agreeable in his eyes. His senses are his guides; pleasure and joy are the aim of his wishes; and his whole life is a round of interchanging enjoyments. But how empty is even his felicity, and how close does pain tread on his pleasures; nay, how inseparably is it associated with them! Contemplate him in the moment that he awakes from his sensual stupefaction, when he is left to himself, when all is hush and still about him, when no wild uproar, no jovial riot, distracts his mind and shuts out reflection. How uneasy he is! How burdensome to himself! What a martyrdom to him is solitude! How oppressive the reflections that involuntarily call his attention to his condition, to his conduct, and to the consequences of it! His heart is empty, and he knows of nothing that can occupy it agreeably. The recollection of his enormities stings him with remorse; and he is forced to own, that he is most unhappy. His senses at length become obtuse; the sources of his felicity fail him. And yet he knows of no other pleasures than such as flatter the senses. His taste is entirely spoilt; and he is incapable of relishing the pure, the ravishing satisfactions which truth and the practice of virtue

virtue procure to the pious. — So deceitful is outward prosperity, my friends. So little reason have you to envy the vicious, when the Lord allows them wealth and honour and halcyon days. They appear to be happy, but are in fact most wretched. Connect these considerations with the following, and you will have a still stronger argument for contentment.

They are these: Many seem to be unhappy, and yet are not so. Oft have you been shocked at the lot of the upright, the virtuous man. His whole course of life is a pattern of the purest virtue and piety. He is a sincere and zealous worshiper of God, a rational and undissembling christian. He is a model of temperance, of industry, of justice; all nefarious means of becoming rich and great, all the arts of craft and fraud, are an abomination to him; an incorruptible integrity dwells in his heart and characterises all his actions. He is a general philanthropist, dedicating his faculties to the good of his country and that of his fellow-citizens, with heart-felt satisfaction. Notwithstanding all this, he may sit in the dust; his services may be unrequited and forgotten; he, this wise, this righteous man, is under the authority of the fool, the tyrant; and his virtue is despised, while the wickedness of the more powerful is crowned with honour. Himself and his family are involved in difficulties, and he

he has not much more than will barely suffice for the sustenance of life. You pity his hard fate ; you compassionate his seemingly bad circumstances ; you wish him a better, and his virtue a worthier lot : but you deceive yourselves ; appearances have blindfolded you. He is happier than the vicious prince on his throne. He is free from the thralldom of the passions, and is master of himself. His innocence covers him, he wraps himself up in his virtue, and his dwelling is the dwelling of peace. He knows that God is his father and his friend, who will never forsake him, never withdraw his favour from him. His days flow on without any anxious cares ; his happiness is not dependent on fortuitous events. The good testimony of his conscience attends him wherever he goes ; it alleviates the most pungent afflictions. He can lift up his eyes to heaven in confidence and joy, and rely on the mercy and help of the God who dwells therein. His soul is serene, and enjoys that peace of God which surpasses all understanding. He finds in the consciousness of his integrity, in the approbation and grace of the Eternal, and in the expectation of the future life, far more sources of joy than that imaginary darling of fortune can meet with in all his dissipations. Content gives a relish to his food, and makes his labours easy and pleasant. He sinks into the arms of sleep with an unruffled mind,

mind, and tastes the sweets of it undisturbed and entire. He can think without terror on death and the grave. He has the loveliest prospects before him, and the approach of his end is welcome; as announcing to him the enjoyment of ineffable and unterminable felicity. And shall you account unhappy this friend of God and virtue; him, whose happiness depends on no outward things, and is as immutable as truth? Much rather confess, that life does not consist in abundant possessions, nor real happiness in earthly advantages. Alter your language and own, that godliness with content is great, *pay* the greatest gain.

My fourth consideration is this: The wise providence of God knows far better than we do our dispositions and abilities, and knows far better than we for what situation we are fitted, and with how much of its blessings we may safely be entrusted. Each man has a certain sphere, in which he may be useful, and may successfully promote his own *well* as the general benefit. Does he expatiate beyond the sphere assigned him; has he got into a station that is above his capacities and powers: he is injurious to himself and others, and his happiness and utility decline, while they ought to augment. — You admire that virtuous man, who lives in moderate circumstances, and wish him a much higher degree of respect and authority

richer than he actually possesses. He is discreet, obliging, bountiful. He knows how to employ his worldly circumstances to the noblest purposes, and makes beneficence his greatest pleasure. Such people, you say to yourselves, should possess a mine of wealth; they should be the general stewards of the goods of the earth; they should be the lords of the world. So would innocence be protected, virtue rewarded, vice disgraced and punished; so would order, righteousness and peace, be established and confirmed for ever. But the sovereign ruler of the world knows the capacities of his subjects and votaries better than you. He knows the possible as well as the actual, and takes account of both in the distribution of his bounties. That virtuous man you mention, who at present enjoys a moderate fortune, may conquer the temptations he meets with to sin. They are not strong enough to abate his generous spirit, or cause him to relax in his purpose of serving both God and man with inviolable attachment. But increase his consequence; augment his treasures; elevate him to a higher pitch of authority and power. His virtue begins to totter; it is too infirm for this dangerous situation. The unusual splendor that surrounds him dazzles his sight; stronger temptations lead him astray; he cannot bear his prosperity. His amiable meekness gives place to pride; and his universal

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sal charity and liberality may easily change into harshness and cruelty. His well-earned reputation declines, or is eclipsed by gross defects. His elevation renders him at length as contemptible and noxious, as his moderate circumstances had rendered him respectable and useful. Cease then, mistaken mortals, from censuring the sovereign of the world, if he exalt not his friends to that degree of temporal greatness, which you think fit to allot them. He deals with them as a tender and sagacious parent, by not placing them in circumstances which if not fatal, yet would be extremely hazardous to their integrity and piety, and their everlasting salvation.

Lastly, my friends, add to the foregoing this one consideration more : Our sojourn here on earth is only the first scene of our lives ; and we must not confine ourselves to that, if we would judge aright. We see as christians an eternity before us, which will very much alter the appearance of things, and perfectly justify the ways of the Lord. The plan of his wise government is not yet evolved. We see as yet only a small part of it in a dim and dubious light. The day of judgment will reveal it to the world ; and the world will pronounce it righteous, holy and benevolent. Let it be that the vicious man obtains here on earth the triumph over virtue, let him gratify his extravagant desires, oppress
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the innocent, and exult in the misery of the poor. Let it be, that he maintains his authority and power to the last, and that his coarse pleasures meet with no interruption. Let it be, that the pious man eats his bread in tears, and passes his days in trouble, that he is despised and persecuted, that his whole life, in the eyes of the sensual, is one tissue of adverse events and disagreeable occurrences. I see another scene approaching, that is incomparably more interesting. I see the judge of the world appear, and hear him summoning mankind before him. What an unlooked for alteration, what a glorious elucidation of the most puzzling difficulties, is produced by this majestic scene! Here I behold the proud, the tyrants, under whose dominion virtue and innocence sat sighing, who shook the rod of extermination over the affrighted earth. Abashed, they let fall their looks upon the ground; they shudder with consternation and dismay; they meet the scorn of angels and of men. There I see the slaves of Mammon, who heaped up unrighteous treasures. They are despoiled of all. Their sordid passions fill them with confusion, and they feel the extremity of distress, an irreparable destitution. Here I descry the voluptuary, who made sensuality his idol, and knew no other pleasures than those he enjoyed in common with the brutes. He cannot endure the looks
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of his judge. His heart is rent with vehement anguish ; a thousand unavailing wishes torment him ; and the remembrance of his deceitful lusts is an inexhaustible source of affliction to him. — There on the other hand I behold the virtuous man, the friend of God, whom the former accounted wretched, who was the sport of fickle fortune, a mark for oppression and scorn. How bright his countenance ! How radiant the lustre that surrounds him ! What awful dignity beams from his eyes ! What tranquillity and satisfaction animate his features ! The day of his redemption is come ! The judge is his friend, and he stands in the closest alliance with him. He is numbered among the children of God ; the very angels honour him and rejoice in his society. He is arrived at the term of his sorrows ; his virtue is rewarded for ever ; and he is put in possession of a felicity that will never be liable to diminution or decay. How richly is he now requited for his humiliations and poverty ! What a glorious conquest he has gained over all temptations and foes ! How nobly is his patience crowned, how ample the rewards of his attachment to God ! — Wilt thou still presume to ask, o thou of little faith : have I cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocence ? What are thy present afflictions, when compared with the joys of heaven ?
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What the sorrows of this world; when set against the grandeur of thy future glory? Rather be struck with remorse for every thought, every word that has ever escaped thee, against the wisdom and goodness of thy sovereign ruler. Beware for the future of rash and ungrounded judgments on the ways of the Lord and on the destinies of mankind. Confess, that neither the seeming prosperity of the wicked, nor the apparent adversity of the good, on earth, impeach in any wise the righteousness and perfection of our God. Follow therefore the precept of the sagacious monarch in his Proverbs: Fret not thyself because of evil men; neither be thou envious at the wicked. For there shall be no reward to the evil man; the candle of the wicked shall be put out.

Allow me, my friends, to conclude these considerations with a few short rules of rational and christian conduct.

The first is: Never pronounce, from the outward prosperity or adversity of a man, upon the moral quality of his heart and life. You will in most cases be deceived, and fall into an extremely improper severity towards the poor and lowly. The preceding remarks must have taught you, that the possession or the destitution of the goods of this life stands in no immediate and necessary connection with virtue and vice. The friends of Job, and their unjust

just behaviour towards that innocent man, should serve you as a warning, and make you cautious in your judgments.

The other rules of behaviour are these: Endeavour after a real and constant happiness, and seek it there alone where it is actually to be found. Apply yourself above all things to the cultivation, the improvement, and the sanctification of your spirit, which is formed for eternity. Endeavour at attaining the essential and permanent advantages which integrity and piety, the knowledge and practice of religion, procure their followers. Make it your satisfaction and your glory to secure the favour and the grace of God, to have the testimony of a good conscience, and to cherish the hopes of everlasting bliss. So will your honour and your pleasures be independent on events, on time and opinion. You will pity the slave of vice, instead of envying his seeming prosperity. You will even be undisturbed, serene and full of hope, amid the greatest reverses in your outward condition.

Be frequently occupied in pious meditation on the infinite grandeur and majesty of God. Trace his ways with attention, and carefully study the beautiful coherence of them. Connect eternity with time, and never think on the present without at the same time directing your view to the future. — How profitable would

would these reflections be to us, my friends ! How would they confound our pride, and chide us for our froward judgments on the dealings of the divinity with the children of men. How victoriously would they answer all our feeble reproaches on his government ! We should have a lively sense of our insignificance, and as it were be lost in the immense extent of his divine domain. We should fall down and with our faces in the dust adore his majesty. We should be still and know that he is God, that his ways are holy and just. The fairest hopes, the most glorious expectations, would refresh our souls, corroborate our virtue and confirm our felicity. With conviction and sentiment we should exclaim : To the only wise God, the Infinite and Eternal, be ascribed all praise and glory, might, majesty and dominion for ever and ever ?

SERMON XIII.

Farther Justification of Divine Providence with regard to the terrestrial Prosperity of the Impious and the Pious.

GOD, happy it is for us, that we are under thy direction and providence, under the direction and providence of the wisest, the kindest, the tenderest of fathers! Happy for us, that we are not left to ourselves, to our own weakness and folly! that not our childish wishes, but thy righteous laws prevail! That thou, the All-wise, the All-bountiful, reignest and rulest, and not we, short-sighted mortals! How undismayed, how serene may we now be amidst all the vicissitudes, however extraordinary and formidable, that happen in nature and among mankind! how composedly behold our destinies as they approach! Know we not that both the one and the other are in thy hand and conducted by thee? — Yes, to thee and to thy paternal guidance and controul we resign, with filial love and loveborn confidence, ourselves

selves and all our fates and fortunes. Far from us be the folly of prescribing to thee how thou shouldst conduct and guide us and our concerns, and all thy children upon earth ! Thou takest cognizance of us, thou lovest us all ; thou alone knowest with certainty what is good and salutary for each of us in his station, in his combination and proper to his appointment and destination. The way on which thou conductest and guidest them and us, whether gloomy or serene, whether rugged or smooth, whether agreeable to our wishes or not, nevertheless leads both them and us to perfection and happiness ! And this is enough to satisfy us ; this is safe anchorage for the soul in every situation, and should still cause us to exclaim with devout emotion : It is the Lord ; let him do what seemeth him good ! No ; far, far be it from us at any time to arraign thy proceedings, or to murmur against thy dispensations, to us incomprehensible as they may be, strange as they may appear ! No ; in humble resignation we will lay our hand upon our mouth, because the Lord has done it ! We at present walk by faith, and not by sight ! Hereafter will a clearer blaze of light surround us ; and then shall we know from plainer intuitions what we have now believed, understand more of thy views, auspicious Power, and of the concatenation of our destinies, and exult, with all the
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inhabitants of the blissful seats of heaven, in songs of praise and triumph: Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou king of saints! Let the meditations we are now beginning tend to work in us that sober and devout acquiescence which becomes creatures to their creator and servants to their lord. These, and all other our petitions we offer up unto thee in the name, and to the utmost of our endeavours, in the spirit of that beloved son, who being in the secrets of the divine counsels, thus taught us to address thee: Our father, &c.

PROVERBS XXIV. 19, 20.

Fret not thyself because of evil men, neither be thou envious at the wicked; for there shall be no reward to the evil man; the candle of the wicked shall be put out.

FROM these words of the wise monarch we took occasion last sunday to justify the ways of God, and to shew you that the outward welfare of many impious, and the imaginary or real misery of many pious persons, here on earth, are by no means inconsistent with the justice of the divine administration. In that view we took into consideration the several characters and fortunes of men. We made it apparent to you, my friends, how liable we are to form erroneous judgments on their hearts, their conduct, and their moral quality, and how seldom we are in

a capacity to place a man with complete assurance either in the class of the wicked, or in the society of the just. These observations have taught us to be cautious and circumspect in our judgments, and to leave the judiciary sentence on the merits of mortals to him alone to whom all hearts are open. We compared the outward prosperity of the wicked with the supposed misery of the good. We contrasted the unstable and frequently the cumbersome riches, the precarious honours, and the deceitful pleasures, which seem to confer so great an advantage on the former above the latter, with the soothing testimony of a good conscience, with the assurance of the favourable regards of heaven, with the peace of mind and the cheerful expectation of a never-ending felicity, enjoyed by the sincere votaries of God and virtue; and we found that these advantages are infinitely greater and more lasting than those. The intimate and infallible knowledge which God has of the proportionate abilities and capacities of his creatures, furnished us with a new fund of acquiescence. We saw that the Omniscient best knows what place is fittest for each of his subjects to fill, what privileges, what endowments, or what trials and adversities, are serviceable and profitable to each of his human offspring; and that very often it is purely the effect of his paternal love, that he denies us a brilliant but dangerous

dangerous success. We lastly adverted to that discriminating day of judgment and retribution, when each shall be rewarded according to his works; when the vice which now proudly rears its head, shall be utterly ashamed and confounded; when the virtue which now sighs in obscurity and distress, shall be crowned with glory and honour; when the former shall reap the universal scorn, and this the pure applause of an assembled world. All these considerations justified us in rejecting with abhorrence every reproach on the providence of God; nay, they laid us under the obligation to adore in awful silence the ways of the Lord, and to confess them righteous and holy. We have therefore ample reason for quieting our minds, and for stifling every complaint on the unequal distribution of the goods of this life. But, can we too frequently employ ourselves in meditating on the perfect administration of the Most High, and the wisdom and benignity of his dealings with mankind? Can we too sedulously combat the petulance and discontent by which mortals so frequently sin against their creator and lord? How ingenious is their pride in giving artful turns to the feeblest doubts, and how difficult to conquer prejudices, which are flattered by the passions, and supported by impetuous and ungoverned appetites? Let us therefore yet devote one morning more to the farther justifi-

cation of divine providence respecting the temporal welfare of the righteous and the wicked. We have still various arguments in hand, which raise the sovereign ruler of the world above all suspicion of arbitrary partiality; and I hope that the discussion of them will communicate a fresh portion of strength and certainty to your conviction that the ways of God are right and exempt from all reproach. The matter of my observations I shall handle under four general heads.

The first is this : We should consider the fortunes of men, not singly and separate, but in their mutual combination. All the events of this world are in very many respects strictly combined together, and it cannot otherwise happen than that they must be attended with good or bad consequences to all succeeding times ; consequences which the wise governour of the world, who acts by general laws, but rarely removes, and never but for the most important reasons. How many prosperous and adverse vicissitudes and events befall us and others, which we deem inconsistent and incongruous ; and yet wherein we should not perceive the smallest appearance of disorder or contrariety, were we sharp-sighted enough to penetrate their combination with remoter and to us unknown conjunctures, to which they owe their birth ! Many of the accidents that befall mankind,

mankind, which seem to militate with the measures of a wise and benign providence, belong in like manner to this class. — Why is such a sinner in a flourishing condition? Why does he live in ease and affluence? Probably the reason of it lies in the former prosperity of some righteous ancestor, whose name by length of time is fallen into oblivion. The Lord had recompensed the virtue and piety of that good man even with terrestrial blessings. Shall we then charge him with injustice, unless he totally deprive the vicious posterity of his upright servant of the still continuing effects of that blessing, although he has expressly promised to shew mercy to the thousandth generation of them that love him? Why on the other hand must such a righteous man struggle with penury and want? Why must he be denied the chief conveniencies of life? Probably the reason of it may lie in the penalty of one or other of his ungodly progenitors; and the combination of things brings certain sufferings and hardships on him, which he has not procured by his own personal transgressions. His misfortunes are not the penalty of his sins; but are the unavoidable effects of the crimes or the misconduct of such persons as lived before him, and to whom, by birth, or some other way, he is closely allied. Shall the Lord work miracles for repelling the natural results of his benevolent
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and righteous administration? Is he to break the concatenation of causes and effects, and by such a revolution in the moral condition of a person change likewise his outward circumstances and his relative position to external objects? Rather are not even these methods of the Most High replete with wisdom and goodness? How forcibly should it allure us to virtue, when we see that its benefits are so diffusive and lasting; when we know that they extend in certain respects even to a degenerate and vicious posterity! How injurious, how destructive, how detestable, should sin appear to us, taught as we are by experience, that even the righteous must frequently taste the bitter fruits of the extravagances of their ancestors and sigh beneath the lamentable consequences of their transgressions! The promotion of virtue however is the ultimate aim of all the dispensations of heaven; and this single remark is already a sufficient answer to every allegation brought by corrupted men against the equity of the government of the Most High.

My second observation is this: God, as in all nature, so likewise in reference to human contingences has indissolubly connected means and ends together; and no man will easily reach the latter, who either is unwilling or unable to use the former. Terrestrial prosperity is partly dependent on certain endowments, capacities and aptnesses,

aptnesses, which have no necessary connection either with virtue or with vice; but generally are founded in the nature of man, in the course of his education, in his outward circumstances, and the like. These advantages may be wanting to the sincerest friend of virtue, or he may have but a slender portion of them: whereas the most vicious may possess them in a high degree of perfection, and in all these respects far transcend the former. But who sees not that this distinction must have a very great influence on their respective temporal success, by the natural order of things? We will draw a comparison between two men: one vicious, who has great capacity of mind, who is well versed in many useful arts and sciences, and is active and alert by nature; and one virtuous, who possesses but small or moderate capacities, who has received only a miserable education, and is withal of a slow and drowsy temperament. They both strive to advance their outward welfare. The former attains his end in a short time, and puts himself and his family in a prosperous condition. The latter never reaches his aim; all his schemes are defeated; all his endeavours prove vain and abortive. You are shocked at their unequal fortunes: you deem it a considerable objection against the equity of the divine administration. But you forget the true ground of the disparity in their outward success.

success. The former, the vicious man has a diffusive and accurate discernment of the best and fittest means conducive to the advancement of his designs; he has the art of profiting by all circumstances of time, place and persons; he is even attentive to the veriest trifles that may in any wise retard or forward the object of his pursuit; in all his resolves, he takes the future as well as the present into consideration; he can discern the far remote and the least observable consequences of things: the other, the virtuous man, on the contrary has but a feeble insight in the affairs of life; his attention is soon wearied; his perspicacity is very limited; and either from ignorance or from natural indolence, he lets the best opportunities of advancing his fortune escape. The former has learnt by reflection and experience to probe the tempers of men, to search out their latent propensities, and to use in his intercourses with them the proper precautions and prudence. The latter from the want of this discernment is credulous; he acts inconsiderately and with too much precipitancy: the confidence he reposes in others is too great, and he is cheated by every pretender. The other is resolute and intrepid in his endeavours; the impediments he meets with, instead of diminishing, increase his caution, and renew his ardour; he frequently hazards a part of his property, and pays no regard

gard even to some considerable loss, when it facilitates the way to some greater advantage: **this**, on the contrary is timorous; every unexpected opposition confounds him; he is deterred from the prosecution of his design, and every little disappointment dispirits him. How then in such circumstances can it be otherwise but that the former must make much greater advances in the furtherance of his temporal interests than the latter, though that man may be vicious and this be virtuous? Or can we require with any semblance of reason, that the natural order of things should be inverted, that ignorance, heedlessness and sloth should be productive of the same or even of better consequences, than industry, circumspection and discriminating sagacity?

The third observation is this: The great and still increasing corruption that prevails among mankind may make it easily conceivable, why outward fortune is often more auspicious to the wicked than to the good. Were virtue more common among mortals than is actually the case; she would undoubtedly be more honoured, more revered, more powerful, more successful. Her friends and followers would certainly have less scorn, persecution and oppression to fear; they would easily triumph over vice, and defeat without difficulty her unjust attacks. But how totally different is the moral

condition of mankind ! The majority have surrendered themselves to the sway of their sensual appetites ; they are the servants of sin, and adhere to the earth. Human society is not what it might and ought to be ; it is exceedingly corrupt. Would any one raise himself from the dust of poverty and contempt ; would he elevate and enrich himself ? The ways by which we may succeed without the dereliction or infringement of our duties do not always lead, they lead but slowly to that splendid object. Would we suddenly approach it, are we determined at all events to be rich ; we must frequently employ such means as christianity expressly condemns, as conscience absolutely forbids, as are incompatible with integrity and virtue. The arts of flattery and insinuation, duplicity and falsehood, are the methods that usually conduct to exalted stations. Injustice, covetousness and fraud, are the unhallowed sources whence riches are not seldom to be drawn, and treasure accumulated on treasure. Pride, oppression and violence, are but too frequently the foundation of authority and respect. Is it a matter of wonder then, if the vicious man, who knows no law but his lusts and passions, should more rapidly advance on his career than the virtuous, who follows the dictates of religion and conscience with inviolable fidelity ? Need we be surprised, if the upright
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man, who avoids even the appearance of evil, who abhors all kinds of deceit, who is firmly resolved rather to lose all than tamper with his duties, or act contrary to the will of his creator and redeemer; if this man, I say, remain in obscurity and meanness, while the other, who spurns the most sacred ties, despises the commandments of the Lord, and seeks nothing but his own private interest, mounts aloft, and according to the expression of holy writ flourishes like a green bay-tree? No; since God will yet preserve the human race, corrupted as it is, and since he does not see fit to remove this corruption by a miracle of his omnipotence, or to alter the wise laws of his government; we are not to be astonished, if on earth there be just men unto whom it happeneth according to the work of the wicked: and if again there be wicked men to whom it happeneth according to the work of the righteous.

My fourth and last observation is this: The adversities which God allows to befall the pious, are highly advantageous to them in many respects. They are very frequently manifest demonstrations of the love of their heavenly father, and produce the fairest fruits of righteousness in their heart and life. I know that, at first sight this appears a contradiction. It seldom comes into our minds, that poverty, contempt, pain, sickness, or other disagreeable events, are

are conducive to our benefit. We behold all these things as mere sources of trouble and misery, and their outward aspect has in truth nothing lovely in it. But notwithstanding this, it remains an undeniable fact, that whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and that his corrections have nothing in view but their true and everlasting felicity. We need only lay aside our prejudice, and consider the chastisements of heaven with impartial eyes, for plainly perceiving their extreme utility. This is peculiarly manifest in the following particulars.

Afflictions produce in the christian a lively sense of the emptiness and fragility of all the privileges and endowments of the earth. They make him more attentive to his spiritual concerns, and inspire him with an effective zeal to work out his salvation with fear and trembling. How often is outward prosperity dangerous to the soul and the salvation of him that has it! How apt are the continual distractions that are attendant on it to stifle the voice of reason, and suppress the suggestions of conscience! How manifold and violent are the temptations to vanity, to carelessness, to an extravagant and dissolute life, by which the prosperous are surrounded, and how difficult must it be to withstand the allurements to evil! How difficult it is in such circumstances to pass a right judgment on the value of earthly things, and

and not to esteem them higher and to love them more, than is consistent with the nature and design of them ! — Consider that darling of fortune, and see the deplorable condition into which it has thrown him. The fallacious splendour that surrounds him dazzles his senses and confuses his judgment. His riches, his honours, his authority, engross all his attention. They so much employ him, that the thoughts of God, of Christ, of religion, and of the chief end of his being, can find no entrance into his mind ; that the most exalted and most important truths make little or no impression on his heart. He is totally enamoured with the goods of the world, and fondly reposes in the uncertain and momentary enjoyment of them. He forgets his creator and benefactor ; he grounds his comfort, his hope, his confidence, in things which are entirely dependent on events, that are utterly unable to render their possessor truly happy. Seldom or never does he think on eternity ; and his mind, which is endowed with such great capacities, and is immortal, remains ignorant and vicious. Death at length overtakes him, and his imaginary happiness is departed for ever. He is destitute of all real and permanent goods, and futurity is terrible to him. On the other hand, consider the pious person, whose fortune is nothing desirable, who lives in poverty and want, and has many a hardship

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ship to bear. How forcibly does his condition convince him, of the vanity and emptiness of all sublunary things ! How clearly does he see the deceitfulness of sense, and the worthlessness of human grandeur ! In what a lucid order does he perceive the destination of man, and the insufficiency of all wherein the sinner seeks his satisfaction and repose ! How vehemently does this knowledge incite him to withdraw his heart from the world, and to fix his affections on worthier and more durable objects ! How agreeable, how soothing to him, is the consideration of the future world ; and what beautiful fruits of righteousness must these views and considerations produce in him ! He reckons himself only a traveller and a stranger upon earth, and regards heaven as his home. The improvement of his heart, the elevation of his nobler faculties, the augmentation of his high and excellent qualities, is his principal and dearest concern. His whole life is a serious preparation for the state of perfection and happiness that awaits him beyond the grave. He contemplates his end undismayed ; and even desires to be dissolved and to be with Christ.

Again, afflictions not only weaken our excessive attachment to that which is visible and transient ; but they quicken, they strengthen and confirm the fairest virtues in the human soul. How apt are flourishing circumstances
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to lead us to haughty imaginations ! What is more common than for the fortunate man to ascribe to himself the greatest merits, to esteem himself the sole or the principal author of his success, to despise his inferiors, to forget whereof he is made, and not to recollect that he will shortly return to his connatural dust ! But adversities teach a man to think more reasonably. He immediately apprehends the sovereignty of God over all ; he is sensible of his entire dependence on that most exalted being, and in humble resignation adores his will. He gives the Lord the honour due unto him, and he is heard to exclaim in complete conviction : Not unto us, o Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name be the praise ! The Lord maketh poor, and maketh rich : he bringeth low, and lifteth up. He it is who raiseth the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the beggar from the dunghill, to set them among princes, and to make them inherit the throne of glory. He doth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth : and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, what dost thou ? Again how ingenious is our self-love in extenuating our faults, and in attributing to our good qualities a greater value than they really have ! How willingly do we conceal ourselves from our own inspection ! How carefully do we hide our misdeeds ! How rarely does it happen,

happen, that a man, in the quiet enjoyment of the pleasures and comforts of life, impartially examines his heart, and labours at his improvement with becoming solicitude ! His brilliant fortune prevents him from submitting to silent reflection on his moral condition, which is however the source whence wisdom must flow. Dizzy with the tumult of clamorous lusts, he imagines he is rich, and increased with goods, and has need of nothing ; and knoweth not that he is wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked. But does the Lord visit us with chastenings : the erroneous ideas we had formed of our moral goodness and of our fancied deserts, all vanish away ; then we are ashamed of the paltry artifices by which we endeavoured to impose upon ourselves. We turn in earnest our thoughts inward ; we prove and examine our hearts and our actions. We view ourselves then as we actually are. We feel our weakness ; we perceive the multitude of sins, of failings and crimes, that render us reprobate in the sight of God ; we bewail our misery ; we deplore our transgressions ; we form the settled purpose to amend ; we vow to the Most High a willing and constant obedience. In this instance who is there but must confess, It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I might learn thy statutes ! Before I was afflicted I went astray ; but now have I kept thy word !

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In like manner are the adversities that befall us not unfrequently the abundant sources of patience, of contentment, of confidence and hope. They teach us to wean our hearts from sublunary things. They call us to place all our trust on the grace and assistance of the Almighty. They excite us to prayer, and to accept and apply the divine promises in faith. They cause us to feel the high worth of religion, and the whole efficacy of its heavenly consolations. They inspire us with amiable and gentle dispositions towards our neighbour; dispositions which are the ornaments of humanity and the characteristics of the christian. They render us sensible to the distresses of others, and sincerely compassionate towards the poor and needy. But are not these the noblest and most respectable qualities? Are they not virtues wherein the christian must be continually exercised, if he would be a worthy follower of his lord, and become like unto him? Is not, in particular, the love of our fellow creatures and universal kindness, the fairest feature in the image of God, which the christian bears? Shall we then complain, if the father of mankind should visit his children with various afflictions, since they are so propitious to virtue, and every way promote the perfection of the soul?

In fine, the obstacles and difficulties which the virtuous man meets with on his journey

through life, add a superior value to his probity and virtue, and augment their gracious reward. The Most High thus proves the faith, the integrity, the perseverance of his worshipers. He gives them opportunity to exercise themselves in all, even the most heartbreaking duties, to demonstrate the vigour of their virtue, and to become shining examples of it. He would make them conformable to Christ, their leader and lord, who entered into his glory by the path of sufferings. He will graciously recompense the fidelity and perseverance of the christian who has sustained these trials, with a peculiar degree of his favour, with the most blessed prerogatives in the life to come. Only in the day of distress does virtue appear in all her native majesty. We have but little reason to admire the contentedness, the liberality, the gratitude, of the opulent man, who lives in affluence, and knows nothing of hardships. His outward fortune undoubtedly deprives his good qualities and actions of much of their value. But consider the christian who passes his days in misery, and observe the lustre his virtues cast around him. Penury and want oppress him; and yet he is contented. He is hated unjustly, tormented, persecuted without a cause; and yet he is patient. Providence bereaves him of the persons who were his principal earthly delight, the comfort of his age; and yet he murmurs
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not against the will of his creator, but with complacency acquiesces in it: All things seem conspiring to his misfortune and ruin; but he relinquishes not his hope, and lets not his trust in the help of the Lord forsake him. Every day brings him fresh cause for dejection; and for deserting the service of despised religion; but he is steadfast and immoveable, and nothing can deter him from the career of righteousness, from the path of life. Easy means are pointed out to him for bettering his wretched condition, and for promoting his temporal welfare, if he will but relax from his virtuous severity, if he will but submit to some oblique transactions; but he remains constant, and no temptation is able to turn him aside from his purpose of living after the will of his maker, and of keeping a conscience void of offence. What a value must such a tried virtue possess in the sight of God, the impartial scrutinizer of human desert! He may make a sure reckoning on an additional portion of his clemency. What a reverence must these decisive proofs of his faith, of his trust, and his integrity, give him in the eyes of angels! Those happy spirits are witnesses of his becoming dispositions, and his magnanimous actions. They spread his praise around the courts of heaven, and blazon through remotest worlds his honourable name. And what happy retribution has such an one thenceforward to

expect? He will receive, as a conqueror, the unfading crown of glory. He will fill an exalted station in the kingdom of the just. His dignity and his glory will be proportionate to his fidelity. Who then does not hence perceive, that the troubles of this life every way promote the real felicity of the pious? Who but must confess with the apostle, We know that all things work together for good, to them that love God?

This then being the case, my friends, should you any longer be shocked, if you know any virtuous persons that are in outward circumstances of distress; since you see that the patient endurance of them is the foundation of their everlasting honour, and their supreme advantage? Or, shall you still presume to arraign the ruler of the world of injustice, if in the distribution of the benefits and distinctions of this world, he regards not always the good or ill quality of the man, but proceeds upon general laws; since you know that our present state is not a state of retribution, but of discipline and trial? No! much rather confess that the Lord even then acts with wisdom and kindness, when he allows the pious to contend with crosses and discouragements, and to experience the most cruel misfortunes. Confess, that all his ways are holy, just and good, and that they have nothing in view but our true felicity. Humbly adore his will, and never impatiently
repine

repine at the dispensations of his providence. Strive to render yourselves well-pleasing to him by holiness and virtue ; and turn both prosperity and adversity, both agreeable and disagreeable contingences, to the furtherance of that grand design. This is your appointment here on earth ; and if you fulfill it, you cannot fail to be happy, let everything else go with you as it will. Do you find difficulties in the divine government over man ; is it veiled at times in clouds and thick darkness which you cannot transpierce : yet never forget, that here we walk by faith, and not by sight. Constantly reflect, that the thoughts of God are not our thoughts, neither are our ways his ways. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are his ways higher than our ways, and his thoughts than our thoughts. Here our knowledge is like the morning-dawn, where light and darkness are at strife. In that other world the perfect day will first appear. There we shall behold nature, providence, and religion, unfolded to our view. There shall we walk in the light of the Lord, and exclaim with all the company of heaven : Halleluia ! salvation and glory and honour and power unto the Lord our God : for true and righteous are his judgments ! Praise our God, all ye his servants, and ye that fear him, both small and great !

SERMON XIV.

Sin considered as the primary Source of Human Misery.

GOD, thou art righteous and holy; but we are sinners. From thee, the father of lights, the purest and best of beings, proceeds every good gift and every perfect endowment; and all real evils proceed from us who abuse thy gifts and blessings, who refuse to obey thy laws, and to be satisfied with the methods by which thou designest to render us happy. All the dispositions thou hast made in the kingdom of nature and of grace, all the precepts which thou hast given us both by reason and by thy word, manifestly conduce to our benefit; and it is our own fault if we do not apply them to the ends for which they are designed by thy kind bounty. Ah Lord, let us constantly discern this truth in a thoroughly perspicuous light, that we may adore thee and thy perfection, and never dare to represent thee, our most clement and benign master, our most affectionate and bountiful father, as the author of our misery. Do thou
teach

teach us to consider sin as the greatest of all evils, and as the source of all ruin, to despise its deceitful allurements, to reject with abhorrence the fallacious profits and pleasures which it promises, and to flee from its dominion as the most miserable captivity. Grant that we may submit ourselves entirely to thee, our legitimate and adorable sovereign, regulate our whole conversation solely by thy wise and equitable laws, and seek our felicity where thou directest us to seek it, and where, according to thy promise, we shall assuredly find it. Bless, to the furtherance of these purposes, the present delivery of thy word. Let thy truth dispel our prejudices, subdue our lusts, and render us wise and virtuous. These our supplications we offer up unto thee in the name and words of Jesus Christ, thy beloved son, our lord and saviour, saying: Our father, &c.

PROV. X. 29.

Destruction shall be to the workers of iniquity.

NOTHING is more common, my friends, than for mankind to complain of the various evils they meet with in the world, and to reckon themselves particularly unhappy. Nay, nothing is more common than for them to throw the blame of their unhappiness upon God, and to charge him with a want of affection, or to ac-
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cuse him of mean partiality. What injustice ! Does not all nature testify, do not all the constitutions and settlements which God has established in nature testify, do not all the capacities and powers he has granted us plainly testify, that he is supremely good, that he loves his creatures with parental affection, that he has not formed them for misery but for happiness, and that he has not left them deficient in any necessary means for becoming sharers in it ? But, says the discontented man, the man that enters into controversy with his maker, whence come then the evils, which nevertheless exist, and which harrass us too sensibly to permit us to doubt of their reality ? Complain of them as thou wilt, they proceed almost all from thyself, are evils which thy own misdeeds, o man, have wrought. They proceed from thy corrupt and vicious affections, from the sins and follies thou committest, from the irregularities and excesses in which thou indulgest, from the abuse of the talents and endowments with which thou art entrusted. Thou complainest of a deficiency of happiness ; and still obstinately refusest to strike into the only certain path that can lead thee to it ; or sufferest thyself to be deterred by the first difficulties and discouragements thou must have to encounter at its entrance. Thou complainest of the misery that goads thee ; and yet continuest to walk a way,

way, of which reason, religion, and experience inform us, that the man who pursues it cannot but be miserable. What inconsistency! When will the infatuated race of man, instead of complaining, rather set themselves about removing the causes of their complaints? When will they, instead of making happiness a mere object of their wishes, earnestly employ the means for attaining it which they have in their power? When will they learn to know that virtue alone can render us truly happy, and sin or vice alone make us wretched? Yes, my friends, wickedness as the wise king assures us, brings with it destruction. It is an expression completely warranted by fact, and the justice of it we may perceive without much trouble, and with full conviction, whenever we reflect upon it, and compare it with the experience of ourselves and others. To assist you in these reflections and in this comparison, is the design of my present discourse; and I am of nothing more desirous, than that the apprehension of sin, as the source of all evil, as what renders us truly wretched, may be efficaciously felt by you at all times, whenever you shall be tempted to think, or to speak, or to commit anything sinful. In a view to this salutary effect, and for convincing you that sin is the prime cause of all human misery, I shall explain and prove the four following propositions.

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The first is: Sin brings a great many evils on man, from which, were he virtuous, he would be totally free. The next is; Sin puts a man out of condition to render easy and tolerable those evils which he cannot wholly avoid. The third is: Sin prevents him from the full enjoyment of the good which not only counterbalances, but far outweighs the evil in the world, or of finding that happiness in the enjoyment of it, which, were he virtuous, he might find, and which, in that case, would compensate the want of so many other things, and bear him harmless from so many evils. The fourth and last is: Sin incapacitates us for the state of pure and perfect happiness which awaits the righteous in the world to come, and in comparison whereof all the troubles and afflictions of the present time enter into no consideration whatever.

Four propositions which put it out of all manner of doubt, that sin is man's destruction. The three former shall make the subject of our present discourse; the fourth, on account of its peculiar importance, we will leave for some other occasion.

I say first then, that sin brings a great many evils on man, from which, were he virtuous, he would be totally exempt. Under this head are to be included the generality of maladies and pains, a decayed body, a wounded and avenging conscience, a restless and discontented heart,
remorse

remorse and shame in relation to the past, vexation and disgust in the present, trouble and affright respecting the future. What dreadful evils, my friends! Are they not the greatest we can meet with here on earth? And whence proceed these evils? Can we affirm with truth that they are unavoidable? Has not God both in nature and religion adopted the wisest methods to foreclose them? Has he not given us both as men and as christians the most infallible preservatives from them? And is it not entirely our own fault, if we neglect to apply these means, or apply them improperly, and are therefore obliged to labour under those evils? — O you, who so often and so bitterly complain of it, who are so prone to seek the cause of it without you, though residing in yourselves alone, only quit the service of sin and vice, only follow the precepts of wisdom and virtue; and the greatest part of these evils, and with them your complaints, will vanish away. Subdue your disorderly passions; learn to govern yourselves; lead a temperate, a laborious, a frugal, a natural life; eat and drink, not for gratifying your palate, but for stilling your hunger and thirst; attend to your calling with a quiet mind, free from all anxious and needless cares; acquire the sedate temper, the cheerful repose, of the wise man and the christian: so will you be unacquainted with the generality of pains
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and ailments ; so will you even strengthen the feeble body you may probably have received from your parents, and reach the end of your life without accumulated sufferings. Be faithful to your duty ; do, at all times and in all places, what you judge to be right and proper according to your best discernment ; revere the commands of your conscience as the commands of God : so will you keep it unhurt ; so will it make you no reproaches ; so will its approbation perpetually attend and reward you. Set bounds to your desires ; direct them solely to real, to generous permanent satisfactions ; learn to distinguish the reasonable and easy demands of nature, from the severe and oppressive laws of pomp and luxury and covetousness and fashion ; and seek to satisfy those, regardless of these ; esteem everything according to what it actually is, and not according to the value set upon it by the world ; seek your honour and your happiness, not in the judgment that others pass on you and your condition, but in the judgment that truth, that God, the guardian and arbiter of your conduct, pronounce upon you : so will peace, satisfaction and tranquillity take up their abode in your breast, and even then not quit it under any reverses of outward circumstances. Live prudently ; live virtuously ; apply your time, your abilities, your endowments, agreeably to the will of God and to the benefit of your brethren ;

brethren ; call yourself frequently to account ; let no day pass in which you have done nothing useful and good : so will you look backward without confusion ; so will you look with satisfaction on the past, and need not be ashamed of your younger years. Prefer the pleasures of the mind and heart, the pleasure of virtuous friendship, the pleasure of beneficence, to all sensual transports ; and shun the childish amusements and pastimes, the tumultuous diversions of worldly men, who abhor thoughtful abstraction and are void of sensibility to the beautiful and good ; so will also the present cause you neither uneasiness nor disgust, and your satisfactions will be no less real than diversified. Conciliate to yourself, in fine, by a devout and holy life, the loving-kindness of God, who hereafter will be your judge ; by good works lay up treasures which wax not old, but will follow you into the eternal kingdom ; faithfully employ the talent which God has committed to you ; put it out to use, and strive constantly so to live as befits men who are to live for ever : so will the future not be terrible to you ; so will it bring you no punishment, no misery, but the most glorious recompense, which the lapse of ages can never exhaust.

And what is it now, my friends, that hinders you, from following these dictates of wisdom, for removing that host of evils ? It is sin that brings

brings destruction ; it brings on a numerous and hideous train of pains and diseases ; it has remorse of conscience, cares, disquietudes, shame, compunction, vexation, trouble and fear, for its attendants. Or, is it not intemperance in eating and drinking, licentiousness in sensual pleasures, excessive voluptuousness ; is it not the violence of headstrong passions, the fury of petulance and anger, the consuming fire of hatred and revenge, the corroding uneasiness of jealousy and envy, that destroy our body, exhaust its powers, and diffuse a mortal poison in our veins, which load it in the prime of life with infirmities and pains, and hurry it into an untimely grave ? Is it not the consciousness of our sins and iniquities, the consciousness of duty deliberately neglected, or of injuries committed knowingly and wilfully against our neighbour ; the consciousness of having acted foolishly, unreasonably, unmercifully, meanly, or having otherwise offended God and our neighbour ; is it not this consciousness that arms our conscience with the sting that torments us with unspeakable anguish, that pursues us with reproaches into all our haunts, that rings in our ears a peal which cannot be stifled by the loudest, the most tumultuous diversions ? Is it not our extravagant and insatiable appetites for riches, for honours, for power, for voluptuousness, which kindle oppo-
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sition and strife in our heart, which divest of its worth what we actually have, which deprive us of its full enjoyment, and which debar us from the path of satisfaction and peace? And what is it that frequently renders our retrospect so full of remorse and horror? Is it not the recollection of the follies by which we have disgraced ourselves; the irrevocable time we have lost; the energies and capacities we have misapplied; the advantages we have neglected; the mischief we have brought upon ourselves and others? What is it that renders the present tedious and insipid? Is it not our vitiated and perverted taste, unfitted for all nobler and more refined satisfactions? Is it not the besotted obstinacy with which we seek felicity where it absolutely cannot be found, in a soil where it will not grow? Is it not the wearisome and vain endeavour after visionary fancies, which we can never catch? Is it not the slavish shackles in which we suffer ourselves to be bound, by custom, by fashion, by the fear of ridicule? What is it finally that renders the future terrifying? Is it not the well-founded dread of losing all our comforts in death, and of being unable to stand the decreitory sentence of the judgment to come? Is it not the idea of the woeful consequences, the grievous punishments that follow in that other world on an irregular and mis-spent life? Is it not the heart
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rending thought of having a God, against whom we have rebelled, for our rigorous judge, and of being excluded from his heavenly kingdom? If you cannot, pious hearers, deny all this, then it remains an established truth, that man, were he wise and virtuous, would be totally exempt from the generality and most acute of the evils which he meets with here on earth; and that consequently sin is his destruction, is the principal source of his misery.

It is so however, not only in these, but also in other respects. It incapacitates him for alleviating and rendering tolerable those evils, which even by a wise and virtuous conduct he could not totally avoid. And this is the second proposition that I have to elucidate. It is certain, my friends, that we may, and often actually do, meet with many evils here on earth, troubles, hardships, difficulties of which we are not the blameable cause. The principle of our corporeal weakness may lie in the original constitution and frame of our body, or in our earliest education, which was independent on our choice. We may, though adhering to the strictest rules of moderation, be afflicted with contagious or other distempers; we may even bring them upon us by acts of beneficence and duty. The most unsullied virtue is not always safe from the shafts of slander and malice. The most generous actions may make persons of less
generous

generous sentiments become our persecutors and foes. The most assiduous industry cannot always secure us from want. The most prudent and honest undertakings will often be frustrated by little, unavoidable accidents. That which ought to redound to our honour, may frequently be the cause why others despise us ; and that which we prize among the dearest of our earthly comforts may without our default be ravished from us. Frequently in this respect one event happens alike to the just and to the unjust. But how different is the manner in which they regard and sustain it ! How light it is to the one ; how heavy, how insupportable to the other ! Is the just man called to forego or to lose certain outward interests ; yet he has many other far greater and more essential properties, which richly compensate this privation or loss. His happiness depends not so much on externals, as on his just and generous way of thinking, on his christian and heavenly mind, on his pacific and harmless temper. He has a quiet conscience, a reconciled and gracious God, and the infallible expectation of a better world. He believes and adores a wise and benign providence, constantly watching over him, which knows and loves him, which makes all things, whether good or evil, work together for his benefit. His hope is not built on transitory riches, nor on the favour of mortal men, nor on

his own infirmity, but on the living and eternal God, who never will mock his expectations nor trifle with his hopes. Animated by this confidence in the ultimate tendencies of the divine dispensations, inspired by this hope, he may say, whatever befall him : The Lord gave ; the Lord hath taken away : blessed be the name of the Lord ! Quite different is the case with the man who abides under the dominion of sin and vice, even though the misfortunes he meets with arise not immediately from his own guilty conduct, but proceed from different causes. He feels the burden of them in all its pressure ; it sinks him to the earth, because he is destitute of the supports of reliance and hope. Forasmuch as he seeks his happiness in external, sensible objects alone, the want or the loss of them must of course be extremely distressing to him, and must often appear irretrievable. Though he may have so much sentiment of religion left as to enable him, under the evils he meets with, to lift up his eyes to a superior being, a great first cause of all ; yet he cannot perceive in them the chastening hand of an affectionate father, but is forced to confess them the condign punishment inflicted by an offended sovereign and a provoked judge ; he must have terrible anticipations of the sadder effects of his righteous indignation, which fill his heart with anguish. The afflictions that come upon him,

him, are not to him lessons of virtue and godliness, for his discipline in the severer duties of christianity, and his preparation for a superior state. They drive him rather into all the extravagances of complaint, of impatience, of infidelity, of despair; they harden him in his arrogant and untractable temper; they often seduce him to injustice, to cruelty, to low and unworthy actions; and all this must of necessity make them far more grievous than they would be to him, if he might venture to promise himself the aids of wisdom and virtue, the protection and favour of the Almighty, and appropriate to himself the consolations of religion. Consequently sin is also in this respect his destruction, the principal source of his misery.

That is not all. Sin prevents mankind, and this is my third proposition, sin prevents mankind from fully enjoying the good which not only counterbalances, but far outweighs the evil in the world, or from finding that happiness in it, which, if they were virtuous, they might, and which then would compensate the want of so many other things, and bear them harmless from so many troubles and calamities. If there be many and great evils in the world, my friends, yet are there far more goods. But for seeing this good, for apprehending its value, for tasting and relishing the whole of its sweets, we must have a wise, a virtuous, a pious heart. In

various and abundant sources of pleasure and happiness, our bountiful creator has not left us deficient even in the present state; but the present state is deficient in people who understand how properly to use these sources of pleasure and happiness; and it is sin alone that reduces them to this incapacity. Only enumerate the benefits and satisfactions, which nature and religion, which domestic and civil society afford us as rational and moral agents, and observe what it is that prevents you from the enjoyment of them; and you will no longer doubt of the truth of what I here advance. Generally speaking, you daily receive various benefits from God; you daily enjoy many gratifications from his liberal hand. These benefits, these gratifications, are certainly greater, both in number and magnitude, than the unavoidable and unmerited evils of life; and the devout and virtuous man who recognizes them, who reflects upon them, who feels their worth, thereby prevents a thousand murmurs. On putting these goods in one scale, and the evils in the other, the latter must naturally strike the beam, and the total amount of his happiness must far exceed the sum of his misery. Whence comes it then that you frequently form different notions on this point? You neither consider nor enjoy these goods as the benefactions of God. You enjoy them without consideration,

consideration, without sentiment, without gratitude. Levity, pride, infidelity ; in short, sin prevents you from taking them for what they are, and from feeling on their account what grateful creatures ought to feel. If piety and virtue actuated your hearts, the slightest boon you receive from God would thence acquire a conspicuous value in your eyes. The enjoyment of it would thence be far more relishing and pleasant. This too, you would say in your heart, is a present from my bountiful father in heaven ; this too is an instance of his beneficent care and affection for me, his mean and unworthy creature : Lord, what is man that thou art mindful of him ? What the son of man, that thou so regardest him ?

If we separately consider the principal sources of pleasure we may here on earth enjoy, we shall be obliged to say the same of them. What a pleasure the wise man and the christian finds in descanting on the manifold works of creation, and the great director's providential ways ; in reflecting on the nature of man, and the revealed will of God ; in contemplating the perfection and happiness for which he is designed, and the means by which God will gradually conduct him to it ! What a pleasure in the adoration and praise of the supreme being, and in the exercises of rational piety and devotion ! If you have no taste for these pleasures ; if you hold
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them for the prolusions of enthusiasm and a wayward imagination : then is it sin that deprives you of them ; sin which debases your nature, enervates your mind, depraves your taste, gives you an earthly and carnal temper, and divests you of all capacity and inclination for raising yourself above the present and the visible, and for maintaining your pre-eminence above the irrational creation.

What a fertile source of diversified pleasure is social life, the converse with intelligent, polished, and virtuous persons ! But if we would enjoy this pleasure, if we would enjoy it in any degree of perfection ; we must be friendly, we must be humble, gentle, kind, complacent. If you be not so ; if you have the opposite defects and failings ; if you behold the advantages and merits of your brethren with invidious eyes ; if you lord it over them ; if you allow yourself to be governed by the spirit of contradiction ; if you are irritated at every real or imaginary failure in the deference you demand from others ; if you accustom yourself always to view mankind on their worst side, and to impute their best actions to unworthy designs and motives : then indeed you will not find in social life that pleasure and satisfaction which it has a tendency to procure you. It will rather prove burdensome, and give you fresh reasons to complain of human misery. But is it not sin, is it not

not your unbridled lusts and passions, that occasion you this loss, that deprive you of this felicity?

What a source of pleasure is beneficence, to which so many opportunities daily invite both the poor and the rich, the small and the great! How agreeably recompensed is the wise man, the christian, for the most painful labours, for the most troublesome exertions; how amply is he repaid the privations he may sometimes suffer, on seeing that this labour, these exertions, this abandonment, promote the temporal or spiritual welfare of his brother, or that at length, after various unsuccessful and discouraging attempts, he finds he has been able to effect some real good! But this source of pleasure likewise is shut against you, who are the servants of sin and vice. If you allow yourself to be swayed by self-interest; if you think you exist only for yourself, care only for yourself, provide only for yourself; if you consider other men, not as friends, not as brethren, but as aliens, of little consequence to you, or even as enemies and traitors, against whom you are constantly to keep on your guard, whom you cannot suppose to have any good qualities; if you reckon every trouble and exertion as lost, which does not directly or indirectly tend to your own fame, to your own emolument: you deprive yourself indeed of a thousand agreeable and delightful sensations,

sensations, which counterbalance a host of the unavoidable inconveniences of life, and the recollection of which are able to enliven us even in its gloomiest hours ; but you deprive yourself of them by your own default, and it is sin that you are to blame for this privation.

What a source of pleasure is friendship ! How materially is the value of the goods we enjoy enhanced, when we can participate the satisfaction they yield with a sincere and hearty friend ! How very much is the acutest distress diminished, when we can pour our griefs into the bosom of a friend ! What bitterness is there in life which real friendship cannot sweeten ? How satisfying is its approbation, even under the contumely of the world ; how soothing its comforts in secret anguish ! But whence comes it, that so few persons have the happiness to understand and enjoy true friendship ? It is sin that deprives them of it ; the vices to which they are addicted disqualify them for it. Wherever selfishness, pride and duplicity dwell ; where inordinate violent passions bear rule ; there can none of the gentle emotions, the quiet joys of friendship ; there can none of her trusty companions, sincerity, frankness, integrity, generosity, find any room ; there what bears the name of friendship, becomes a low traffic of artifice and flattery, a selfish interchange of deceitful benefits, which none any longer seek than they can find their account in it.

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How great lastly is the domestic happiness of the wise man and the christian! Though he pass the greater part of the day in disagreeable, irksome labours; though the world requite his best services with ingratitude and malignant scorn: what a refreshment, what a reward to him it is, when he comes home to his faithful spouse, to his fond and dutiful children, and in company with them forgets the ungrateful world; when he regains the familiar hearth, and enters into pleasant, judicious and profitable discourse with the friends of his soul; when he can form the minds and the hearts of his children, delight himself in their amiable innocence and simplicity, enure them to reflection, lead their judgment, confirm their taste for what is right and substantial, make their duty their delight, and observe the success of his generous exertions! But you know not these recreations, these pleasures, these rewards, you that are the servants of sin and vice. Your own deficiency in wisdom and virtue disables you from imparting them to others, and from relishing the sweets of these worthiest of all employments. Your heart is become so callous and insensible, that only wild and riotous joys can make impression on it. Pride prevents you from condescending to the weakness and simplicity of children, and you perceive not the importance of their early education; or
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your churlish, uncomplying, imperious temper, renders you incapable of that employment, and of the pleasures connected with it. In short, it is sin that conceals and prevents you from using this pure and exuberant fountain of delight. Sin is therefore in this, as in all other respects, destruction to the workers of iniquity. An awful truth ! May it always be present to our minds ! May it in particular open the eyes of such as have hitherto been blinded by sin, and make them attentive to their true felicity !

O you who sigh under various evils which do not necessarily arise from the constitution of nature, or from connection with the creatures around you, but proceed from your own temper and behaviour, cease to repine at the severity of your lot, at a cruel and inexorable fate. Presume not to tax the gracious and merciful father of mankind with injustice towards you. Complain not of him, who is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works ; but let your censure fall on yourselves and your own infatuation. Lament not that you are human beings, for as such you were ordained to happiness, and it was in your own choice to be partakers of it : but lament that you have mistaken the true end of your being, that you have stopped your ears to the calls of wisdom and virtue, which alone can lead to happiness ; that you have suffered yourselves to be stupefied by

sin ; that you have given credit to its deceitful promises ; that you have sacrificed to it your understanding, your liberty, your honour, your repose, and your hopes. And if you are still so fortunate as to discover this, if you know the true source of your misery ; oh then forsake it without delay. Flee, in sacred horror, from a track that has brought you so near perdition, and in which you cannot continue a moment longer without the extremest danger ! Renounce, abjure your sinful course, which has degraded and debased you ; which has enervated both your mind and your body ; which has rewarded your slavish obedience with anguish and misery. Shut your ears for the future to the voice of that charmer. Let this sentence of truth : Destruction shall be to the workers of iniquity, never escape from your mind and your heart. Imbibe the instructions of wisdom, of virtue and godly fear, which still, in mercy, offer you help, which still would make you happy. Follow their counsel ; employ all the time, all the abilities, all the talents you still possess, agreeably to their suggestions ; strive henceforth with unabating ardour to clarify your understanding, to purify your heart, to conquer your lusts, to alter your conduct ; and incessantly implore of God, the father of lights and grace, the author and giver of every good and perfect gift, the assistance and support he never withholds

holds from them that devoutly and sincerely ask it of him. Then will your wounded conscience be healed, your restless heart be quieted, your depraved taste be refined, your freedom again restored, your hopes in God confirmed; then will the sources of pleasure and joy which you have hitherto not known or not regarded, and yet which can alone procure us real joy and real pleasure, be opened to you. Then will the very evil, under which, on account of your former sins, you still must sigh, serve you for admonition, for correction, for exercise in virtue, and hereafter, with this body of death, they will quit you for ever, and your end will be complete and undecaying felicity.

SERMON XV.

Sin considered as the primary Source of Human Misery, with regard to the future State.

GOD, thou hast constituted us not solely for the present, but also for an everlasting life. Here we are placed, that by faith and virtue we may be prepared for that superior state, and rendered capable of that perfection and happiness to which thou purposest to exalt us in a better world. Thy mercy leaves us in no want either of encouragement or means for always approaching nearer to our destination, and for actually attaining to it hereafter. Thou hast even sent thy son to us from heaven, that he might inform us of the way that leads to it, to go before us, to conduct and encourage us upon it, and to give us complete assurance of the glorious termination of it. Ah Father of mercies, how much hast thou done for us! How much art thou still continually doing, in order to render us better and happier! Oh that we were so wise as to do likewise on our part what thou requirest of us for our own good, and to neglect
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that which thou forbiddest, because it is in opposition to our happiness! Let us then perceive and understand thy gracious designs upon us, and not foolishly resist the accomplishment of them. Let us never forget the great end of our being, but constantly so think and act as becomes creatures whom thou invitest to an everlasting felicity. Grant that we may shun and detest sin, which excludes us from it by rendering us incapable of it, and never cease to labour at our improvement and sanctification, that henceforth we may have communion with thee, who art pure uncreated light, and in it may find everlasting comfort and bliss. In conformity to these views, we pray thee to bless the meditations that are now to engage us. Let them dart light and conviction upon our minds. Let them make a deep and lasting impression on our hearts. Let them manifest their efficacy in a holy and pious life. We implore it of thee in the name and words of thy blessed son, our lord and saviour Jesus. Our father, &c.

PROV. X. 29.

Destruction shall be to the workers of iniquity.

VERY few christians are perhaps absolutely indifferent as to the felicity that is promised to the confessors of Jesus in the world to come, or who may not flatter themselves with the hope of obtaining

obtaining it. There are however but too many who do so on insufficient grounds, and will find themselves hereafter miserably deceived in their expectations. And what may now be the reason of this? The felicity of heaven is considered as a free gift of divine mercy and grace, as a fruit and effect of what Christ has done and suffered for mankind: and so in fact it is. But it is not considered, that this felicity stands in a strict association with our present state; that it presupposes certain personal qualities and capacities, a particular cast of thought and action, congenial affections and dispositions, without which we cannot enjoy it, or if we might, we could not be happy in that enjoyment. If a man adopt only the former statement of this happiness, namely, in so far as it depends on the grace of God and the merits of our redeemer, he may easily be deluded by fallacious hopes. For, what may he not presume to expect from a God, who has already granted him so many tokens of his kindness and protection, of his patience and long-suffering, whom the whole universe of created beings proclaims to be the most affectionate and merciful parent of mankind; what may he not, with all his unworthiness and frailty, presume to hope for from such a God? And what may he not promise himself from the saviour of the world, from the tender and affectionate friend of man, whom it cost so much

much to redeem our race, and who performed such extraordinary things that we might not perish, but have everlasting life? Yet, how just soever these inferences in certain respects may be, the most important question still remains concerning our hopes of happiness. The question is, not only how extensive the bounty, how great the compassion and grace of God and Christ may be, but likewise whether we have the capacity for enjoying the effects of it in the future world? Let a man have never so powerful a patron, so liberal a friend; let his friend be never so much inclined to impart to him of his riches, his power, his pleasures, his prerogatives: what will it all avail, if he finds no relish in these communications; if diseases, pains, infirmities prevent his enjoying them; or if anything else in his circumstances render him incapable of it? Just so is the case with the happiness of heaven. God has promised it to us on certain especial conditions; Christ has prepared the way to it for us; we are invited to it; and we cannot doubt of the readiness of God and Christ to make us partakers of it. But are we capable of this happiness? Can God grant it us, can we enjoy it, if we remain as we are, if we die in our present condition? Can God exalt us to the possession of such goods, and render us happy by such goods, as we neither understand, nor prize, nor love, nor know how
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to employ? This is the grand question, and yet is perhaps the least thought of. Did we but duly reflect upon it, we should soon find, that a want of virtue and piety, that a love of iniquity, an earthly mind and a vicious heart, must render us totally unfit for the bliss of heaven, and that therefore, in this respect likewise sin is our destruction.

A short time ago we took occasion from these words of the wise king to enter into several interesting considerations on the subject, which we reduced to four propositions. The first was: Sin brings very many evils on man, from which, were he virtuous, he would be totally free. The second was: Sin disqualifies a man for rendering easy and tolerable those evils which he cannot absolutely avoid. The third was: Sin prevents him from the true enjoyment of that good which not only counterbalances the evil in the world, but far outweighs it; or, from finding that happiness in the enjoyment of it, which, were he virtuous, he might find, and which would then supply the want of so many other things, and indemnify him for so many hardships and evils. These three propositions we have already illustrated and established. We have still however the fourth proposition, which we could at that time only specify, to bring to a somewhat nicer scrutiny. It runs thus: Sin incapacitates a man for that state of

pure and perfect bliss, which awaits the righteous in the world to come. The elucidation and demonstration of this proposition, will now demand, as it surely deserves, our utmost attention ; since it relates to a matter that nearly concerns us all, and has a prodigious influence on our welfare.

We must first of all define somewhat more precisely the terms and expressions we have here made use of, and shew what is presupposed in the proposition we have now to prove.

When we assert that sin incapacitates mankind for sharing in the felicity of heaven, we understand by sin, not such oversights and errors as a man commits from inadvertence and infirmity, which he confesses, is sorry for and disallows, and is still labouring sincerely to correct ; but we mean deliberate, wilful presumptuous sins, an overweening inclination and affection to this or the other kind of sins, a disposition, vicious, earthly, carnal, and repugnant to the will of God. When we speak of the felicity of heaven, we imply, not so much the arbitrary rewards which God in his wisdom and goodness will distribute to the just, and of which, in our present state, we can form no adequate conception, as rather the natural good and agreeable consequences which the religious and virtuous temper, and the religious and virtuous conduct of persons here on earth will draw
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after them in the future world ; consequences, which must of necessity be in strict analogy with that degree of perfection to which we here attain. And this analogy likewise indicates in what sense we say of vicious men, that they are incapable of the felicity of heaven. We by no means intend to assert, that their souls are so radically constituted, that they absolutely could not find any relish for that happiness, if God should place them anew in a state of preparation, and if, in that state, by instruction, by reflection, by practice and actual enjoyment, they should come by degrees to understand the value of heavenly blessings, to compare them with their former empty pleasures, and learn to prize them to their height : we would only be understood to mean thus much, that in the habits of thought and action which the vicious man takes with him out of this world, no reason is discoverable for making us comprehend how he at once, and without a peculiar divine illumination and inspiration, which he certainly of all men has no right to look for, can seek and find his happiness in quite different employments and pleasures from those in which alone he has hitherto sought it.

We take for granted likewise, that the future life relates to the present, and stands in the strictest connection with it. If this were not the case ; if in death we lost all self-conscious-

ness, and all remembrance of the past; if the conjunction between our present and former state were broken and dissolved: then must we be as it were new formed; it would not be us, but other creatures living in our stead; then would the predisposals which God has made on earth for our improvement, our discipline and trial, be all in vain; then would our present state not be, as reason and scripture inform us that it is, a state of discipline and preparation, and the future state not a state of retribution. If therefore we would not fly in the face of all that our own reflection as well as divine revelation tells us of our destination and the designs of God upon us; we must necessarily consider our future state as a continuation of the present, and admit a strict correspondence between them.

We farther presuppose, and this presupposition is a natural consequence of what I before advanced, we presuppose that a man retains after death the mind, the temper, the affections and inclinations, he had on earth, and which here have governed him; and that he carries them with him into the world of spirits. If this were not the case, then must God, as I have already intimated, divest us at the moment of death of our temper and character, which constitutes our moral identity, and direct our affections by a miracle of his omnipotence to quite other objects. We have however not only no
reason

reason to expect this, but have the strongest reasons to believe the contrary. For, if such a great and wonderful change should take place in us by death; if we were to receive at once a quite different mind and quite different inclinations and affections: could we truly be said to be the same moral agents? Could we be rewarded or punished as such? And is such a sudden metamorphosis reconcilable with our nature? Are not time and practice indispensably necessary, are not repeated, continued efforts and exertions indispensably necessary to the acquiring of other dispositions, for acting contrarily to any propensity that has been long indulged? Does not all that we see in creation and providence, inform us, that God proceeds with his creatures agreeably to their natures, and that their improvement as well as their deterioration goes gradually on; and that it is effected, not without their concurrence, but principally by their own agency and consent? And does not holy scripture say the same: Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap; for he that soweth to his flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption: but he that soweth to the spirit, shall of the spirit reap life everlasting?

This being premised, my friends, it will not be difficult for us to shew, that a wicked, vicious, groveling disposition, renders mankind incapable

incapable of enjoying the felicity of heaven. Two considerations will, I think, set this beyond all further argument.

Experience teaches us first, that it is impossible for us to be happy when forcibly deprived of the objects on which our principal inclinations and affections are set, and wherein alone we seek our happiness; if we vehemently long after those objects, and yet view them only at a great distance, or are absolutely without hope of ever obtaining them. Give a man never so many goods, which he does not covet, or which he far undervalues to others, he will still be unhappy and wretched so long as you deny him those which he accounts his highest good, and to which his principal longings and pursuits are directed. Let the ambitious man, for example, be furnished with all kinds of sensual gratifications and pleasures; let him possess health, strength, opulence; but debar him the way to power and fame; prevent him from rising to that eminent station which he keeps constantly before him as the object of his wishes: he will be unhappy in the possession of the greatest advantages, so long as he feels the bounds that are set to his predominant passion, so long as he sees no outlet for satisfying the cravings of that. What is true in this life, my friends, will also be true in the life to come. What is now conformable to our nature, will also then be conformable

formable to our nature. Transport the hardened sinner, the vicious, the groveling-minded man, into heaven, into the assembly of the just. Shall you therefore have rendered him happy? Or will he there be more capable of happiness than here? There, where all that promised him happiness here, or even in part procured it him, no longer exists? He brings his desires and appetites with him into the future world, for he held them fast to his end. He thinks, judges, longs and wishes there, just as he thought, judged, longed and wished here. His endeavours here after what had a tendency to flatter his lusts and sooth his passions, have oft been fruitless; but oft has he been beguiled by a transient enjoyment of the things after which he was in pursuit, constantly has he been deluded by the hope of a more perfect and lasting enjoyment of them. But there the whole of that wherein here he sought, and at times even found, or at least imagined he found, his pleasure, his glory, his benefit, will no longer have existence. How could he be happy there? Or, can the miser, who was only alive and delighted when he could heap treasure on treasure, when he could barter or sell his goods to great profit, when he was counting his riches, when he was musing on his extensive pretensions to the necessities and conveniences of this life, or could realize those pretensions by his
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great revenues ; can he be happy there, where those necessities and accommodations are no longer known, where those treasures have no longer any stamp and currency, where they will not procure him the smallest respect, not gain him the slightest distinction, where they subsist no more, where he is bereaved of them for ever, and yet knows and loves no better treasures that may indemnify him for their loss ? And is not the case the same with the ambitious, with the slave of vanity, with the voluptuary, with the envious and malicious, with the earthly-minded ? They all carry with them their perverse habits of thought and judgment, their vitiated taste, their irregular lusts, their violent passions, their earthly mind, into the future world. Their appetites and affections will be turned towards the very same, or similar objects, with those towards which they were directed here. They will seek their happiness in the very same things, wherein they sought it here. But they must necessarily fail in their designs. Their endeavours to get nearer to them cannot but be futile. And can a man in such a situation be happy ? Must not the appetites that are become so connatural to him, and which he cannot satisfy, be a perpetual torment to him ? Must they not, so long as they have any authority over him, make him utterly incapable of aspiring after endowments of another kind,

kind, of seeking them, of enjoying them, and of being happy in their enjoyment?

I am well aware, that it is the body and external objects that contribute most to the raising and nourishing of evil desires in the vicious man, and that therefore under a change of outward circumstances these desires may be enfeebled, and receive another direction. But does this invariably happen; and is it probable that it should happen by means of death? May not these inclinations of the soul become at length so congenial, and as it were essential, may they not be so closely embodied with the whole tissue of its customary ideas, that they may even subsist without the smallest excitation from externals, and under the consciousness of a total deficiency of the objects towards which they are directed, and occasion extreme perturbation and distress? Will not this be the case so long at least as the soul remains without conjunction with any new body in the invisible world, and is left entirely to itself and its own reflections? And can we, completely ignorant as we are in reference to its future relations and habitudes to outward objects, conclude with any probability on the influence of those objects upon its temper and opinions? May not even these things furnish fresh nutriment to its corrupt and sinful propensities in such as have been habituated to form erroneous judgments of all

all things, and to abuse them? Do not the quality and effect of the impressions which mankind receive from without, depend greatly on the degree of discriminating sagacity, on the temper and moral habit of their mind? And may not this likewise obtain in the future world? Can we easily be mistaken in concluding, from what now is, on what will be hereafter, and figure to ourselves the transit of rational creatures from one state of being to another, not as a leap, but as a change which takes its rise from the preceding, and is most intimately associated with it? — However, we will insist no longer on this. The second proof of my proposition will set the subject in a clearer light; and it is of such a nature as to be sufficient, without any assistance from the former, to prove what it is intended to prove.

Experience then teaches us secondly, that it is impossible for us to be happy there, where no other pleasures and occupations are to be found, than such as are contrary to our taste and affections, as are entirely foreign from our mind, which we have never cared about, which we have beheld with apathy and indifference or treated with scorn, which we have postponed to all other employments and pleasures; how noble soever these occupations, and how pure and how elevated soever these pleasures, in themselves and in reference to others, may be.

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Thus however it is with the occupations and pleasures of the blessed in heaven. They are contrary to the taste and affections of the vicious man. They are inconvenient and irksome to him. He is therefore absolutely unqualified for enjoying the felicity that accompanies them. In what we here on earth take no delight, in that shall we likewise find none in heaven. What here seems irksome and disagreeable to us, will there also be irksome and disagreeable to us. For we shall not there directly learn to think and act quite otherwise than here; but we shall there reap the fruit of the good or bad manner in which we have thought and acted here. The future life is not to be a totally different and quite contrary life to this; but it must be, especially as to the exertion of our intellectual powers and the practice of virtue, a continuation and retribution of the present. Therefore the same difference that subsists between the taste, the habitual tendencies of the mind and aptnesses of the righteous and the wicked in the present world, will subsist in the future likewise. As little susceptible as they are now of the same species of pleasure, so little will they be so then. Place here a pious and a vicious man together, who both frequent a reasonable worship. The former finds the greatest pleasure in it. Wherefore? His mind is then engaged in occupations which he constantly

stantly holds the most momentous and sublime, and which even confer a certain dignity and grandeur upon him, which at other times he does not so sensibly feel. He strengthens himself in his belief of the truth; and truth is inestimable to him. He expands his heart to the sentiments of reverence towards God, to love for the redeemer of the world, to benevolence and brotherly kindness towards all mankind; and these sentiments most agreeably enlarge and cheer his heart. He prays; he praises God; he hearkens to his will; and all this procures him light and tranquillity, consolation and genial joy. The other on the contrary, the vicious and earthly-minded man, grudges as it were the time he is obliged to devote to these objects. They are tiresome to him. Wherefore? He does not account them so transcendently important as they are. He apprehends not the beauty and utility of them. He finds no relish in them. He receives no agreeable sensations from them, or they excite disagreeable sensations in him, which he would willingly banish or suppress. Do you think now, my friends, that the vicious, the earthly-minded man will find greater relish in these kinds of pleasures and occupations, in the world of the just, than he does at present? He will always, as I shewed at setting out, retain his general disposition, his temper and habits of mind,

mind, in the future state, and judge and act accordingly. But how indisposed must this render him to all that wherein the blessed find the whole of their happiness and their glory ! Only call to mind what holy writ and the very nature of the thing, conspire to teach us of that glorious state ; and you will soon comprehend how little adapted it is to the man that is addicted to sin, and devoid of all true piety and virtue.

The blessed, in that life, as the scripture speaks, will see God ; that is, they will learn to know him better and more adequately. God will more intimately reveal himself to them. They will obtain new means and opportunities for forming worthy conceptions of his attributes, of his ways and works, of his counsels and decrees. They will discover new displays of his omnipotence, of his wisdom and his goodness. They will see the son of the Highest, their great deliverer, in his glorified humanity. They will behold the transcendent glory with which the Father has invested him, and be led into all truth by himself. This will doubtless be at once their most delightful occupation and the richest source of their pleasure. Thus will the fervent desire which now actuates all the powers of their soul, their ardent aspirations to apprehend somewhat more of the first, the greatest, the best of beings, and more closely to be acquainted with the sublime philanthropist,

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who purchased them with his blood, be fully satisfied ; and yet will those desires remain so active as never to be weary in their noble endeavours after still higher degrees of light and knowledge. But now, I would ask, are these endeavours, are these delights, adapted to such of you as are wholly earthly and carnally minded, to you who have not learnt to rise above things visible, and to occupy yourselves about the things that are not seen ? How ? Religion is indifferent to you ; her exalted doctrines cannot move you ; you content yourselves with the slightest knowledge of them ; you reckon the time you are forced to apply to it, as lost ; you prefer all other kinds of science and knowledge to the knowledge of God, of Christ, of his revealed will ; you are surrounded with innumerable prodigies of divine omnipotence, wisdom and goodness, and you heed them not ; you even shut out from your mind all reflection on God and divine concerns ; you are afraid of being disquieted by such reflections, and disturbed in your thoughtlessness and your vanity : and you shall be capable of employing yourselves in those reflections for ever and ever, and find your felicity in them ! You shall be capable of applying your faculties and your time, with heartfelt pleasure, and with increasingly renovated zeal in considerations and inquiries, which are now so strange, so irksome, so disagreeable to you !

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The life of the blessed in heaven will farther be a life of the purest, the most exalted piety and devotion. The God whom they have feared and loved above all things here, in whose service and worship they have already passed so many happy hours, will certainly be there much more the object of their sincerest love, their profoundest adoration and their heartiest praise. To admire his infinite greatness, to extol the methods of his providence, to magnify the wonders of his grace, to celebrate his inexpressible love and the love of his son Jesus, and to glorify him in all their thoughts and words and works; this will incontestably be their worthiest employment, their transcendent joy. But is it an employment, is it a joy, that you are susceptible of, you in whose heart the fear and love of God have never maintained the ascendancy over your inferior appetites and instincts, and to whom the worship of the supreme being was tiresome? How? You neglect under every nugatory pretence your attendance in the house of God, where your fellow-creatures are employed in his service: you even neglect prayer, the praise of God, and private devotion at home, and spend the little time that remains to you from your business, in mere idle dissipation and frivolous amusements; or you perform these sacred duties with reluctance, with aversion, in an extremely cold and drowsy manner; you seldom

dom think on your dependence upon God; you enjoy the manifold gifts and graces which he showers upon you both as men and as christians with an insensible and ungrateful heart; you lose sight of the divine providence, or murmur against it when it does not comply with your extravagant desires: and you shall be capable of bringing to God, in that other world, the same pure sacrifice of adoration, of praise, of gratitude, of love, of submission, of resignation, which is offered up to him by all the inhabitants of heaven! And you shall be capable of seeking your highest honour and sovereign happiness in thus drawing nigh to the deity, and in having communion with him!

The life of the just in heaven is a life of pure holiness. It is the most perfect exercise of virtue; of that virtue which they here prized and loved above riches and honours and life, in which they constantly exercised themselves, the defects and interruptions of which they so often bewailed with floods of tears, and which, notwithstanding all their infirmities and failings, still maintained its supremacy in their hearts, and was the ruling principle of their conduct. No more to sin; never to deviate from the precepts of wisdom and moral order; to apply all their capacities and powers agreeably to the will of God, and to proceed from one degree of moral perfection to another: what ravishing delight,

light, what a perennial fount of satisfaction must it be to the man who has a ruling propensity to whatever is decent, whatever is true, whatever is right, whatever is generous and laudable ! But are you capable of drawing from these wells of satisfaction and joy, you who hold virtue an empty name ; or, if you do not absolutely deny her existence, yet neither understand her worth nor feel her charms ; or, even if you be not entirely ignorant of her value, yet have not so much esteem and love for her as to make you sacrifice for her sake the vile lusts of the flesh, and a few worldly interests ? Are you capable of seeking your glory and happiness in virtue, you who deride her sincerest votaries, sport with their conscientiousness, pronounce them morose and melancholy people, and lavish your applause on impudent and successful vice ? Are you capable of properly feeling the happiness of not being liable to sin and to err any more, you, who are so easily tempted to evil, and yield with such consenting facility to the temptation ; who lament and bewail every other loss more than the loss of innocence and inward peace ; who are unable to perceive, that the only loss irreparable is the loss of our probity ? Are you capable of practising virtue in its highest perfection, you who have never once begun to practise it in sincerity though in weakness ; from whom every good deed must be in a

manner extorted; who have acquired habits, not of goodness, but of iniquity; to whom lying, or intemperance, or injustice, or rancour, or some other vice, is become a second nature; or who only take pains so to be just and virtuous, as you hold it indispensably necessary for escaping infamy in this world and punishment in the next? May it not likewise here be said; How can you do good, how can you be happy in doing good, who are accustomed to do evil?

The life of the blessed in heaven will be an amicable life, where all the social virtues will be practised in perfection; where sincerity, ingenuousness, modesty, peace, concord and love prevail; where a mutual, disinterested and beneficent endeavour to communicate perfection and happiness to others, to unite all hearts together in the closest bands of affection, and where all the sources of pleasure, however various or abundant, will constantly stand open. Neither pride, nor vanity, nor envy, nor falsehood, neither tyranny nor strife, will exist in that blessed abode. With one accord to join in serving God; with one accord to consider the wonders of his creation and providence; together to magnify his transcendent grace and mercy; to disseminate truth and virtue according to the extent of their means; to rejoice in the felicity of a brother

as well as in their own ; to make their extended perceptions and abilities conduce to the noblest works of beneficence : this will certainly be the disposition, the employment and the happiness, of the righteous in the life to come. Now, I beseech you, my friends, are persons who serve sin and vice, suited to such a society ? Are they capable of taking part in their happiness, or of promoting it ? How ? Persons who are addicted to dissimulation and artifice ; who allow themselves to be swayed by pride, by envy, by vanity ; who are foolish enough to swell into importance contentions about rank, precedence and outward distinctions ; persons who can never live peaceably and amicably in the domestic and civil society to which they belong, who find pleasure in strife and debate ; persons who are so selfish as to think and to care solely about themselves, who only prize that which they possess alone, or have in common with but few, whom other men's happiness and misery affect but little, or who even dare to build their welfare on the ruin of others ; persons who employ their power, their interest, their opulence, not in doing good, but in oppressing the poor and the innocent, or solely to their personal profit and to the aggrandisement of their family ; persons who are ashamed in company to speak of God and divine objects, who de-

spise such discourse, however naturally it may arise, as the effects of an exuberant piety and hypocritical devotion, and had rather converse on the most insignificant trifles, than on subjects that in all respects are the most important ; are such persons qualified to consort with the just, who think directly otherwise, judge directly otherwise, are directly otherwise disposed, and are employed in quite different occupations ? Shall they be capable of a felicity, of which they have no notion, after which they have never gone in pursuit, and which is in such manifest and direct opposition to the whole of their character ? No ; any more than light and darkness can consist together, no more can virtue and vice have fellowship together in that state of perfection.

Lastly, my dear friends, as the scripture assures us, God, in that better world, will be all in all. The blessed will have him perpetually before their eyes, and only live and be happy in him and in the sentiment of his favour and affection. Whatever they do will be done with no other view than to please and to glorify him. All the happiness they shall enjoy will be enjoyed in reference to him ; and this it is that renders their satisfactions heavenly. But how, think you, shall we be ever capable of thinking, of feeling, and of acting thus,

thus, if here on earth we have had a mind altogether earthly, and carry this earthly mind along with us into the future world? How? You, who so seldom at present meditate on God, so seldom seek him; who ascribe all that befalls you, whether good or ill, to other causes; who advert more to fate, or chance, or fortune, and other similar nonentities, than to God and his providence; who do all that you do, solely from motives of self-interest, or vanity, or the fear of man, or for satisfying the demands of your sensual appetites; shall you hereafter be capable of adopting a quite contrary disposition, and acting upon quite opposite principles? Shall you be able to seek and to find in them your honour, your pleasure, your felicity? No; it is impossible in this, as in all other respects, for the vicious, the earthly-minded man to be happy there, where no laws, pleasures and occupations have place, except such as are directly contrary to his inclinations, his taste and his habits.

And what is the inference we are to draw from all this? It is: that sin is the destruction of man; that it is the principal source of his misery both in the present and in the future world; that no other means are to be had for becoming capable and for partaking of the blessedness of heaven, than the actual conversion, the actual alteration and reformation of
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our temper and conduct, the steady direction of our inclinations and desires to whatever is real, good, noble, well-pleasing in the sight of God, and will be so for ever. Let no man therefore flatter himself with the hope of a late repentance. Let no man stave it off to the last hours or days of his life. That hope is without foundation : that delay is irrational. In a few hours or days the mind and heart is not to be altered without a miracle, and such miracle God has no where promised to work. We may then indeed bewail our sins ; but that contrition is generally wrung from us by the critical conjunctures in which we are. But seldom, seldom is it sincere and efficacious. No sooner are circumstances altered, than the sinful propensities of the heart return to their former bias, and that bias unfits us for the happiness of heaven. Neither let any man appeal for evidence to the contrary, to the example of the thief upon the cross. How much may be recollected against it ! At present only attend to this : What has happened in extraordinary circumstances, what has happened only in one instance, what is and ever will be singular in its kind, cannot be made to serve us for a rule, cannot give us the least probable expectation, that it will happen so with us. No, no ; christians, if you would be blessed hereafter, you must ~~not~~ be capable of that blessed-

blessedness. And this you cannot be so long as any evil disposition presides in your breast, so long as you are addicted to any sin, to any vice. Sin is the destruction of man both in the present and in the other world. Virtue and piety are the only passports to happiness. It is even not enough, that we cease to do evil, that we forsake sin, that we perform good deeds. We must have a hatred to evil, we must have an abhorrence for sin, we must learn to love goodness. Our heart, our temper, must be changed and reformed. We must learn so to think, to judge, to act, as they in heaven think and judge and act. We must direct our inclinations and affections to such objects as have a value there, and will retain it for ever. We must now render easy and agreeable to us the occupations which await us there. These are the only methods for becoming capable of the bliss of heaven : and if we be capable of it, we shall as surely be partakers of it, as God is God ; because he conducts every creature, as its nature and capacities allow, from one degree of perfection to another ; nay, he has promised us this happiness expressly by his son, and this son of the faithful and true God has ratified that promise by his death and by his resurrection. Oh, my brethren, let us then, since we have such glorious promises, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness

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filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God. Let us continually watch, continually pray, keep constantly firm to our duty, and so behave as servants that expect their Lord ; that the Lord, when he comes, may find us faithful and ready. ~~and~~ receive us into his glory. Amen.

SERMON XVI.

How we make ourselves Partakers of other Men's Sins.

GOD, heavenly father, thou hast decreed us all to serve one another, reciprocally to promote the welfare of each other, and to learn wisdom and virtue from the various circumstances in which thy providence has placed us. Let us then all follow thy precept, by doing what thou wouldst that each of us and our brethren should do. Grant that the eminently intelligent and wise may diffuse as much light as possible around them, and render their greater sagacity and knowledge constantly more general and useful; that the busy and enterprising may excite much good and useful activity among their fellow-creatures, and open to them new sources of industry and application; that the great and powerful may, as brethren, condescend to the low and weak, and be their support and protection; that the rich may employ their riches in acts of beneficence, and the humble and poor, by honesty and fidelity, by becoming

coming dispositions, may render their station and their poverty respectable. Let the healthy, o God, judiciously employ their time and their talents, constantly striving at their own improvement, and never deferring what they can do at present to an uncertain futurity. Suffer not the sick to sink under the burden of their afflictions ; teach them to revere thy will, in filial resignation, as that of the wisest and tenderest parent, by employing all their remaining strength in the exercise of patience and the practice of virtue. Let the sentiment of their mortality and the reflections on immortality be truly important and salutary to them ; and when they are about to leave this world, grant that they may leave it in pious and christian dispositions, and alleviate to them the passage out of it by the hope of a better, an everlasting life, — Teach us all, o God, to do thy will ; to live up to our christian vocation ; more assiduously to urge onward in wisdom and virtue, in the pursuit of intrinsic lasting excellence, than in the acquisition of outward transitory distinctions ; and in all that we do and do not, to look to thee and our future superior destination. Let thy mercy lighten upon us, who put our trust in thee, and hearken to our prayer, which we conclude as the votaries of thy son Jesus, in his name and words, saying : Our father, &c,

I TIM. V. 22.

Neither be partaker of other Men's Sins.

THE true christian, if he would deservedly bear that name, can never be too circumspect in his words and actions, and in the whole of his deportment. The various connections in which he stands with other men; the influence his conduct may have, and actually has, on theirs; the innumerable good or bad consequences with which it is attended respecting the whole community wherein he lives, nay, frequently with regard to remotest posterity, obliges him to pay all possible attention, to be offensive or injurious to none, but as useful to all as possible. It is not enough that he fear the Lord his God himself, and make it his delight to keep his law. He should let his light also shine before men. He should apply all his faculties to promote the saving knowledge and the rational worship of God, to disseminate truth, piety and virtue. It is not enough that he hate and eschew sin himself, and is still labouring to cleanse himself from all defilement of flesh and spirit, and to live in the liberty of the children of God. He should strive, as much as possible, to weaken and subvert the dominion of sin and vice, without him; he should carefully abstain from whatever has a tendency to give

give others an occasion or inducement to sin, that may confirm and tranquillize them in their evil disposition, or excuse their failings and transgressions ; he should so manage all his gestures, words and works, as neither directly nor indirectly to countenance impiety, but much rather, in all respects to stigmatise, to confound and to chastise it. He who designedly neglects these duties, brings upon himself the guilt of other men's sins, and incurs the same penalty as if he himself had committed the sin in his own person. Therefore it is that St. Paul cautions Timothy, and with him every real christian, against this inconsistent behaviour, when he says, Be not partaker of other men's sins. The more liable we are to err in this behalf, pious hearers ; the more necessary it is for us to form just conceptions of that extensive and important obligation. How shall we avoid such errors unless we are apprised of them, or unless we perceive their bad and pernicious tendency ? Let us therefore apply the remainder of our present discourse to the purpose of considering, in the fear of the Lord, how we make ourselves partakers of other men's sins.

It happens first, when we so far abuse the authority we have over others as to require of them what is bad and sinful in itself ; whether it be unjust superiors who lay such injunctions
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on their subordinates as are contrary to the laws of reason and true religion ; or inconsiderate parents, who enjoin their children such actions as militate against the dictates of virtue, of probity, of honour and decorum ; or finally selfish masters, who require of their servants things incompatible with the duties of honesty, equity, humanity, fidelity and veracity. In all these cases, they who give such unjust commands sin as much as he that executes them. That king of Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar, presumptuously commanded his subjects to fall down and worship the golden image which he had set up, and to worship it as the true God. They undoubtedly committed a flagrant sin in obeying the senseless and tyrannical command. No human authority is competent to weaken or abrogate the immutable relation that subsists between us and the great creator of heaven and earth ; and we are guilty of high treason against the divine majesty, if from the fear of man and a slavish obedience we comply with such injunctions as are in opposition to his sacred and inviolable law. We ought to obey God (it is an eternal decree), we ought to obey God, rather than men. The friends of Daniel saw this truth with full conviction. Nothing could induce them to deny the only true God, or to do an act that was in opposition to his will. Their undaunted courage, their unshaken confidence in the Almighty,

mighty, ought reasonably to have served as an example to others, and have kept them from executing the impious command of their king. But did not the guilt of all their sins rebound upon the head of him who issued that command, and enforced obedience to it by the severest threats, who abused his power to insult the honour of the supreme being, and employed the blind submission of his people to induce them to revolt against the creator and sovereign of the world?

We, secondly make ourselves partakers of other men's sins, when we employ others as the instruments of our sins and iniquities. The wretch that is actuated by low self-interest, has perhaps no desire to hurt another; and the crimes he commits in the name of his superiors on whom he depends proceed rather from an undue compliance, from an inordinate thirst of riches and honours, than from premeditated malice. "He knows" that this is the shortest way to conciliate the favour of him who urges him to such undertakings; he sees that by these means he may better his condition, advance his fortune, and procure respect; and thus raise himself from obscurity into notice and importance. At first indeed he doubts, whether even these advantages are of so much worth as to be purchased at the price of a manifest breach of integrity, and its ordinary concomitant the loss of

of inward peace. But at length he stifles the remonstrances of conscience, and eludes the suggestions of reason. He flatters himself with the fallacious hopes, that his criminality cannot be great, as he is not the first mover and author of it, as his views are not to injure any, or to bring them into trouble, but merely to execute the will of him whom he regards as the promoter of his temporal interests. The vexations or oppressions he occasions his brethren, as an instrument of the revenge or the malice of another, would still, he thinks, ensue, though he should refuse to inflict them. But he does not reflect, that all these excuses are not sufficient to justify him before the supreme tribunal of heaven ; that it argues the most infamous prostitution of mind to acquire favour by wicked actions : and that all other considerations should give way to the observance of the divine commands, to the discharge of the duties we owe to our neighbour.

We farther make ourselves partakers in other men's sins, when we abet others in their wicked projects, by advice or by actual assistance. Many a one is not so unfeeling or malicious as to plunge his neighbour into ruin. He only considers how he may promote his own temporal interests or administer to his criminal pleasure ; and this he makes no conscience of doing even by deliberately contriving to despoil the widow
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and the orphan, to ruin the innocent. But he is deficient in artifice; he cannot tell how to compass his design, how he may accomplish his scandalous purpose in the speediest and surest way. He goes to another, who probably is less wicked, but more subtle than himself. This man, from a mistaken friendship, or a defect of universal benevolence, gives him a sketch of the manner how he must set about gratifying his depraved appetites, and satiating his furious passions; and thus takes part in all the crimes the former is determined to commit. Another is deficient neither in craft nor malice. He burns with desire to revenge himself on his adversary, or to satisfy some other brutal instinct, and is acquainted with all the ways and means that may contribute to his purpose. But he has not power and credit enough to avail himself of them with effect; he is unable to execute the vile resolution he has formed to the injury of his neighbour, unless he call in the aid of a mightier than himself. He finds one such, who directly or indirectly gives him a helping hand; by vouchsafing him his protection, by giving him countenance, by procuring him opportunities to accomplish his wickedness. Is not this man as criminal as the other, since it lay solely with him to have defeated his iniquitous schemes, by a rational and prudent demeanour, and to have snatched the innocent from the snares which the other was spreading for him.

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We make ourselves, fourthly, partakers of other men's sins, when we induce others to sin by our example, and as it were inspire them with the audacity it requires. What numbers allow themselves to be governed solely by the example of others! They would probably have been virtuous, if they had had the good fortune to live amongst virtuous persons, and the opportunities of being edified by their inoffensive and pious deportment. The enchanting patterns of justice, of temperance, of piety, of humanity, of generosity and magnanimity, would probably have made a durable impression on their minds, and excited them to imitation; they would have been forced to respect and to love the virtue and goodness which they saw so becoming in others, which render them so amiable in the eyes of all impartial beholders, producing such excellent fruits in the whole of their conduct, procuring them the purest pleasure, and the most solid and lasting peace. They would at least have been thus prevented from doing evil, and from being injurious to their neighbour. They would not have dared, in the presence of such respectable persons, to do what would infallibly bring upon them the most cutting rebuke and the most righteous contempt. Vice would even at length have appeared detestable to them, and they would insensibly have acquired the habits of virtue.

But now, seeing that others, to whom probably they owe deference and submission, whom they look up to as intelligent and prudent people, knowingly and deliberately sin, that they make no scruple of it, that they implicitly follow their depraved appetites, trample under foot the commands of the Highest, and make the will of the world and the flesh the only rule of their conduct ; the apprehensions that have hitherto restrained them from the service of iniquity, vanish away. They surrender themselves blindly to the sagacity and judgment of those whom they have selected for the models of their behaviour. They think that it cannot go ill with them, while they follow such examples as these, while they tread in the footsteps of persons to whom birth, or knowledge, or opulence, have procured a certain reputation in society, which seems to conceal their bad qualities, and shield them from the penalties they would otherwise have to expect. In this manner does one vicious man make himself partaker in the sins of many others ; and the more elevated his rank, the more eminent his endowments, the more brilliant his outward advantages, the greater is his criminality, the greater the number of the wretches he plunges with himself into ruin.

We make ourselves, fifthly, partakers of other men's sins, when we allure others to sin by our carriage towards them, and as it were urge them
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to it. This holds particularly in reference to the affronts we put upon our neighbour. Shall he that treats his neighbour with scorn, that affronts him by looks or words of hatred, or robs him of his honour or his fame by malicious slanders ; shall he bear no part in the sins which this man commits, when, put out of his temper, and roused into fury, he returns railing for railing, endeavours to redeem his honour by unlawful and violent means, and, in the stormy emotion into which the other has thrown him, commits actions which he otherwise would have shuddered at with horror ? Indeed the latter is not to be excused. He has evidently transgressed the injunction of Christ : Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you ; and that of the apostle : Be patient toward all men. He should have moderated his just indignation, and have left vengeance to the tribunal of a superior judge ; he should have governed himself, and have shamed his adversary by magnanimity and beneficence. But on the other hand, the former, who has provoked him to these excesses, is as little, nay still less to be excused. His crime as well as his guilt is two-fold greater. — Yet another example. Suppose a sovereign should harrass his subjects ; oppress them with grievous burdens and austere commands ; refuse

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them justice on their reasonable complaints, and frequently deal cruelly with them. His subjects are so far misguided as to withhold from him, nay even from the laws, that reverence and submission which is due to them both ; secretly betray both him and the country, or rise up in dreadful mutiny and tumult. They sin, by not taking the lawful means to remedy these grievances, and by making them far greater and more extensive. They are guilty as traitors and rebels. But is their sovereign less criminal than they, in furnishing them with the motive, since, by a proper discharge of his trust, by an impartial administration of justice, by a mild and equitable government, tending to the general good, he might have prevented those enormities ?

We make ourselves moreover partakers of other men's sins, when we behold their sins and iniquities in silence. I know, my friends, that no small degree of prudence and discretion is requisite for not going too far on one side or the other in this respect. There are times and circumstances when it is more decent and useful to be silent, than to speak. Unseasonable rebukes commonly do more harm than good, and are productive of no other effect than to bring hatred on him who administers them. In some companies, by hasty and zealous reproof, we should draw ridicule and contempt not only on ourselves, but even on religion and virtue.

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In such situations it is our duty to be silent; but even that silence may and should be accompanied with such signs of displeasure as shall free us from all suspicion of approving the wickedness we are obliged to see or to hear. It may often be very significant, and give rise to more reflection in others than particular and grave remonstrance. But there are likewise cases where we have not to apprehend these effects from our reproof, if well-founded and administered with candour and moderation, with prudence and discretion. In these cases silence is sinful, and indicates either an approbation of the sins that are committed in our presence, or a coolness in the cause of religion and virtue. It is usually a culpable fear of man that restrains us from admonishing our neighbour of his faults, and from expostulating with him on the impropriety of his conduct. It is more than possible indeed that by so doing we may give him offence, and occasion us the loss of his friendship: for few men will acknowledge with gratitude any intimation of their failings. The generality reject such suggestions with displeasure, regarding them as open violations of the respect that is their due. But then should not the cause of religion and virtue, the discharge of our duty, the salvation of our brother, be of more weight with us than the favour and affection of any man? Nay, should not the very esteem and
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love we have for others engage us to warn them of every deviation, as much as in us lies, and to snatch them from the ruin they are rushing upon? Here may be applied that saying of our saviour: Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both body and soul in hell. — Whosoever shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my father which is in heaven. And can anything be more express on this head, than the command of God, which we read in his prophet Ezekiel: When I say unto the wicked, O wicked man, thou shalt surely die; if thou dost not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity, but his blood will I require at thy hand. It may be alleged, that this crime was greater under the peculiar government which the deity administered over his ancient people, forasmuch as it was a species of high treason against God, the king of Israel. But, to maintain the honour of the Most High, and to support the reverence due to his laws, is of eternal and unalterable obligation, incumbent upon us at all times, and from which nothing is able to absolve us. But ~~how~~ can we be said to comply with it, if we hear the sacred name of God blasphemed, if we see his

his commands despised and his bounties abused, and yet remain indifferent and silent? And how peculiarly criminal must this silence be, if by the discovery of a base design, we might have prevented the execution of it, or if by due remonstrances, we might have kept a man from the commission of sin!

But we **make** ourselves in a still greater degree partakers of other men's sins, when we not only are silent with regard to the sins that others commit, but openly vindicate, justify, or even applaud them. By this the sinner is hardened in his iniquity; he is freed from the pangs of conscience, which else would torment him. We therefore make sinning easy to him. He loses by degrees that sense of shame, which otherwise would have checked and repulsed him perhaps from continuing his evil courses, and advancing further in his vicious career; at length he proceeds to boast of his enormities, and seeks approbation and praise, by such actions as ought to cover him with shame and confusion. And how common is this way of partaking in the sins that others commit! Perhaps it is our friends or relations that have sinned. Hoodwinked by self-love, we perceive not their faults; we endeavour at least to extenuate them by every means we can devise, and then affirm them to be mere inadvertencies, only sudden lapses and infirmities. We are
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lothe to make them uneasy by shewing them their pernicious effects. Sometimes we are ashamed of their misconduct, and endeavour to conceal it, lest our own honour might be sullied by it. Thus we excuse ourselves by justifying others. We do not recollect the impressive words of our redeemer: He that loveth father or mother more than me, is not worthy of me; and he that loveth son or daughter more than me, is not worthy of me. At another time, it is our superiors on whom on one or another account, we are dependent, whose behaviour calls for animadversion. But we are afraid of affronting them, and thus exposing ourselves to the danger of losing their goodwill. We rather do all we can to please them; and, because flattery commonly avails much to the attainment of that end, we have recourse to it, without blushing at being guilty both of falsehood and meanness. We therefore spare their grossest faults, and study to gloss over their most flagrant enormities, so as to vouch them, if not praiseworthy, at least indifferent and blameless. But is not this to be called sanctioning the follies and sins of the world against our own conviction, and encouraging the slaves of vice in their perverse dispositions?

In like manner, my friends, we make ourselves partakers of other men's sins, when we propagate and defend such opinions as sap the foundations

foundations of morality, and are favourable to licentiousness and impiety; when we countenance the prejudices that are entertained against the practice of virtue and real christianity; when, instead of refuting, we strive by every argument of sophistry, to uphold and confirm their pernicious authority; when in short we endeavour to make religion contemptible by ridicule, and to weaken the evidences of its truth and divinity. What would restrain the sinner from giving full scope to all the licentiousness that agrees with his temperament and predominant passions, if he imagine the arguments for his obligation to virtue to be weak and invalid; if he regard the duties which reason and revelation enjoin, as human inventions, which have no other end in view than to keep the vulgar in awe, and to prevent universal disorder? Is it not these errors and prejudices that quiet the sinner, that lull him into security, and deprive the workings and stings of his conscience from having their proper effect? Are not all the remonstrances, the exhortations, the promises and threats, that God has delivered in his word to mankind, very often insufficient to reclaim them from sin and corruption; how much less would they hesitate to continue their course undaunted, if they once could bring themselves to doubt of the divine origin of those remonstrances, those exhortations, those promises and threats,

threats, or reject them as the work of artifice and imposture, undeserving the least serious regard? What bounds would they fear to transgress, what commands would they revere, if they had once got so far, that their hardened hearts could no longer be moved by the majesty of God, and the authority of his sacred laws? Oh what irreparable mischief have those erroneous and fatal opinions already occasioned in the dominion of piety and virtue! How great the number of the wretches, who, blinded by them, have rushed headlong upon destruction! And what deplorable havoc do they still make among mankind! Of what innumerable sins then do they render themselves partakers, who uphold such errors, who embellish them with fascinating eloquence and misapplied wit, and thus render them probable and acceptable to such as either cannot, or will not, take a closer survey of the subject.

Lastly, my brethren, we make ourselves partakers of other men's sins, when we do not, as much as in us lies, endeavour to prevent them. A particular instance or two will best illustrate what I mean. A poor man, destitute of all human assistance, harrassed day and night by cares for the morrow's bread, who can devise no means for procuring support in an honest way, falls at length into extreme distress, and becomes weary of life. The rich man knows his distress; is
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able to rescue him from it without injury to himself, and to render him happy by affording him some small relief; but his avarice or his insensibility permit him not to do so. The poor man sinks into total despondency, finds courage in desperation, and either has recourse to unlawful methods for prolonging his life, or puts an end to it by violent means. Shall the rich man in this case be guiltless? Shall he have no share in the crime which he might have prevented by so small an exertion of bounty? — One instance more: Suppose we should discover that some one of our acquaintances frequents bad company, and in thoughtless levity is approaching the toils of sin which temptation has spread along his path. He is on the way to lose his innocence, and with it his satisfaction, serenity and composure of mind, to become a prey to voluptuousness, and is rushing on the brink of ruin. But nobody takes up his case; nobody warns him of the danger he is every instant approaching. Probably he would have hearkened to the friendly caution; probably he would have forsaken the company of profligates, and with redoubled ardour have walked the way of righteousness. But our indolence, our apathy, have accelerated his ruin and deprived him of the most efficacious means of deliverance. Have we any right to complain if a part of his condign punishment be imputed to us, if we are obliged to share with him in the guilt of sin?

“ Lord.

“ Lord, who can tell how oft he offendeth ?
Oh cleanse thou me from my secret sins !”
Who of us, my friends, does not feel himself compelled to break out in this confession and prayer, on laying the foregoing reflections to heart, on applying them home, and observing how easy it is to become partaker of other men’s sins, and in what various ways it may happen ? Yes, this is the first use you are to make of these considerations, if you would reap benefit from them. They should animate you to an impartial scrutiny into your heart and life. Examine then your former conduct ; compare it with the important duty we have now been enforcing ; ask yourselves how you have hitherto fulfilled it, and in what particulars you have acted against it. What a series of sins, of errors, of crimes and weaknesses, you will detect in this inquiry ! How much negligence, how much fear of man, how much criminal compliance and duplicity will your conscience lay to your account ! Of how much coldness in your jealousy for the honour of God, of how much unconcern for the everlasting salvation of your neighbour, will it accuse you ! Give full scope to the salutary shame and confusion that must naturally arise from these ideas. Humble yourselves in the sight of God, confess your guilt, lay hold with penitential faith on the grace which our redeemer has promised the sinner, if he sincerely deplore

deplore his sins, and take up the firm resolution to commit them no more.

But also let these meditations lead you to bestow a strict attention on all the parts of your future behaviour, to a circumspect and inoffensive conduct. Keep a perpetual guard over yourself, and exert your utmost endeavours to regulate all your words and works by the precepts of religion, the dictates of virtue. Call frequently to mind the various connections in which you are placed with other persons, the duties to which you are bound with regard to their spiritual and everlasting welfare, and the great utility or mischief you may thus occasion them. Never lose sight of the great ends for which you are created, redeemed, and called to christianity; and walk as burning and shining lights in the midst of the crooked and perverse generation of this world. Do you find difficulties and discouragements in the discharge of this duty, as must be the case in the present state of things; flee to the sanctuary of the Lord your God, and repeatedly implore him, with David: Try me, o God, and seek the ground of my heart: prove me, and examine my thoughts. Look well if there be any way of wickedness in me; and lead me in the way everlasting.

SERMON XVII.

Directions for learning to pray from the Heart.

GOD, who with thy presence fillest heaven and earth, and art nigh with grace and help unto all who devoutly and faithfully call upon thee, what an honour, what a happiness it is for us that thou permittest us, weak and sinful creatures to lay our requests before thee, and to approach thee in prayer as ingenuously and boldly as a child approaches his parent. Oh how much should we lose were we ignorant how to prize this honour and to use this happiness! What sources of consolation, of serenity, of joy, of strength and energy, would then be shut against us! But alas, we are sensual, earthly beings. We know not how to estimate things aright; and prayer, which ought to be our darling employment and most agreeable recreation, proves too frequently a troublesome burden. Our hearts so cleave to the earth, and to visible objects, that it is too often difficult for us to detach ourselves from them, and to rise in thoughts
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and desires to thee, the greatest and best of beings. Oh do thou come to the relief of our infirmities, almighty and merciful God! Inspire us with such a heavenly mind, 'such a generous temper, as may render us desirous and capable of holding correspondence with thee, and frequently and earnestly employing ourselves on objects that alone deserve to engross our attention, because they alone are great and eternal. Grant us the spirit of prayer. Enlighten our understanding, that we may ever better learn to know thee and thy glory, and delight in divine contemplation and worship. Let our hearts be constantly penetrated with grateful praise for thy bounties, and our mouths overflow with that whereof our hearts are full. Teach us thyself to understand our necessities, to have a due sense of our weakness, to aspire after real and permanent satisfactions, to sympathize in the joys and sorrows of our neighbour, and to look up to thee, the common parent, with filial confidence, for all that we and others want. Do thou attract our hearts, that we may constantly fix our regards upon thee, never be unmindful of our dependence on thee, and make it our sole endeavour to please thee, and by thee to be happy. Bless to this purpose the doctrines that are now to employ our meditations. Grant that they may tend to make our exercises of private and public devotion more easy, more delightful

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and more profitable to us than they have hitherto been, that we may prefer them to all the sinful diversions and frivolous amusements of worldly-minded men, and constantly improve in the attachment to those satisfactions which will be our joy for ever. Harken to our prayer, for the sake of Christ our saviour, in whose name we further call upon thee, saying: Our father, &c.

LUKE XI. I.

And it came to pass, that as he was praying in a certain place, when he ceased, one of his disciples said unto him, Lord
* teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples.

WE have at various times discoursed to you on the duty of prayer, my pious hearers. We have shewn you how natural, how becoming, how profitable and salutary it is, for rational creatures to prostrate themselves in humble adoration before their creator; for guilty sinners to seek pardon and forgiveness of their judge; for indigent, feeble, corrupted beings to flee to the Almighty and Allbountiful for succour and support; for creatures in short whom God has blessed with so many benefits, whom he has so highly favoured in Christ, and to whom he has given such glorious promises, to come before his presence with thanksgiving, and to extol his never-ceasing goodness. We have at the same time shewn you, how our prayer should be framed, and what pious sentiments and feelings should

should animate us, for rendering it acceptable to God, and profitable and comfortable to ourselves. I am even persuaded, that we all, or however the generality of us, acknowledge the justice and solidity of the reasons on which the duty of prayer is founded; and certainly no man will doubt, that our prayer should be offered up with devotion, humility, sincerity, seriousness and confidence for rendering it an act of divine worship. But now do we behave consistently with our knowledge and our faith? Do we fulfill our duty in this behalf with propriety, as reasonable creatures and christians? Does our heart impel us to prayer, or is it only our outward circumstances that occasionally urge us to it? Can we, and do we actually pray frequently and with pleasure? Have we made prayer an easy and pleasant employment to us by reflection and practice? Indeed if nothing more were requisite to this end, than to read or repeat certain formularies at stated intervals, not absolutely without attention and devotion, all the difficulty would at once be removed. But it requires no depth of thought to perceive that a christian, who with propriety bears that name, and who is determined not always to remain at the lowermost step of knowledge and piety, cannot be sufficed with this. No, his duty and his proper interest require of him, that he should habituate himself to pray likewise from his own heart,

heart, or to present his petitions, his thanksgivings, his intercessions at the throne of grace, in his own thoughts and expressions, But this appears extremely difficult to the generality of persons, and frequently even to such as actually have an earnest desire to please God ; and the lively sense of this difficulty prevents them from taking the necessary pains for surmounting it. The difficulties however attendant on this duty are not so formidable as is commonly imagined. The great stress of the business depends on this, that we earnestly desire to learn to pray from the heart, and that we employ the means and regulate the exercises proper for rendering us expert in it. He that does this, and continues the practice for some time, will by the divine assistance infallibly reach his aim ; and the utility and the pleasure he will then receive from prayer, will richly compensate him for all the pains he has bestowed upon it. My present discourse is designed, my friends, to facilitate these pains to you as much as in me lies, and to smooth the way for you to the utility and pleasure you may promise yourselves from rational exercises of devotion. I intend at present to give you some directions for learning to pray from the heart ; that is, without prescribed forms, or prayers got by rote : to pray in your own thoughts and words. Accept and use this instruction with the same sincere docility in
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which the disciples of Jesus formerly came to their master and said ; Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples. My directions for learning to pray from the heart will consist of two principal points. In the former I shall explain the method in which it is to be learnt, and how we are to acquire the habit of it, as well in general, as according to the various parts of prayer in particular ; in the other I shall supply you with some rules of christian prudence for facilitating the practice.

Would you learn to pray from the heart, my friends ; you must enure yourselves to reflect on all subjects that have reference to religion, to our souls, to our moral condition and our everlasting salvation, and diligently exercise yourselves in such reflections. It is with these topics as with those which relate to our outward condition and our worldly concerns. If you think but seldom and coldly on the affairs of your vocation, on your business, on your trade, on the sciences or the arts you follow, on the connections wherein you stand with other persons ; it will be difficult for you to discourse with others about them ; difficult for you to ask proper advice of your friends on such specific occurrences as relate to them ; difficult to express your satisfaction at the success of your undertakings, and communicate it to others ; difficult to thank them properly for the assist-

ance they have afforded you, the prudent advice they have given you, and the like. But if you muse often and heartily and with great interest on these matters ; if you seldom totally lose sight of them ; if you bestow on them serious and patient consideration at all times ; nothing will be easier than to make your apprehensions of them known to others, and to address them properly with such requests, thanks, or intercessions, as relate to them. Apply this now to what concerns religion, your obligations, and your everlasting salvation. If you never, or but rarely think of these things, or if you think of them only in a desultory manner, without continued attention, and only at times cast on them a transient glance ; you must indeed find it difficult to make these matters the subject of your prayer, to converse on them with God and yourself, and to do so with that earnestness and devotion which the importance of the objects demands. If then you would facilitate this noble occupation to you ; accustom yourselves to reflect on what most nearly concerns you as rational creatures, as the moral subjects of God, as christians and heirs of a blessed immortality. Appropriate certain hours to it, when, retired from all temporal affairs and worldly distractions, you draw off your attention from outward, sensible objects, and place it on such as are spiritual, invisible and future. But then let not
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your thoughts ramble abroad in the regions of fancy, and glide too rapidly from one subject to another; for thus you will never acquire any radical knowledge of the topics whereon your thoughts are employed, and they will make no deep and lasting impression upon you, especially as they are not things which we see, hear, or handle, but such as we can only apprehend by our minds, and of the truth and certainty whereof we cannot so well be assured by sentiment, as by argument and the deductions of reason. If then you would exercise yourself in christian meditation, and thereby render yourself expert in prayer; set certain limits as it were, to your mind. Take some particular doctrine, or some particular duty of religion and christianity before you. Read the passages of holy scripture, wherein that doctrine, or that duty, is chiefly treated of; or read a section of some good book, where those passages of scripture are selected, elucidated and applied. But mistake not this reading for reflection. It is only to furnish you with necessary materials or suggestions to that purpose. Ask yourself, as you read, and after having read: Do I understand now this doctrine? Do I comprehend all the words and expressions in which it is couched? Do I think somewhat clearly and definitively of it? Can I repeat what I think of it to others? And why do I believe this doctrine? What arguments

arguments have I for holding it true? How does this doctrine relate particularly to me? In what connection does it stand with my happiness? Can it give me any comfort in afflictions, or any useful rule of conduct? Or does it tend to clear up to me certain matters which have disturbed and perplexed me? If it be some duty whereon you are reflecting; then ask yourself: What am I obliged to in my conduct by this? In what particular conjunctures, on what occasions, am I to do it? What should I at present impress on my memory and on my heart, that I may be able to do it at such seasons? Have I always done it hitherto, and what has generally prevented me from doing it? How can I, how should I obviate these obstructions? What have I to object to the justice and reasonableness of this duty! Are these objections well-founded? Do they absolve me from it? Will not the pains it may probably cost me be afterwards amply repaid? &c. Thus, my friends, ought we in general to enure ourselves to reflection. We can never be deficient in materials. We have an extensive field before us, where we may constantly discover new beauties, gather new fruits, detect new treasures, if we do but earnestly seek them. God, his attributes, his works, his ways, his will; man, his nature, his faculties, his weaknesses, his duties, his vocation, his present, his future

future state of being ; how important these objects ! How pregnant with wise and pious, with useful and comfortable reflections, sentiments and emotions to the christian, who is learning to meditate upon them ! And how conversant must all this render him in whatever belongs to prayer ! This information however is still too vague. We must descend to the particular parts of prayer, and see how we are to exercise ourselves in them by reflection and rational consideration.

The first and principal part of prayer, is the adoration and the praise of God. But this, at the same time, is the most difficult to many christians, who are deficient in information and practice. At least it appears very difficult to many. How, it is said, how can I in my own words and solely from my heart adore my God, who is so great and glorious ? It is true, it requires discriminating judgment and reflection. But then is not that judgment to be acquired ? Cannot every man exercise himself in this reflection ? Are you desirous of it, my friend ; and if you have religion at heart, you must of necessity be desirous of it ; then above all things consider, what it is to adore and to praise God. Is it not to conceive of God as he is ; to ascribe to him the attributes, the prerogatives, the perfection which he possesses ; to admire him for all these, and thence to form a just sense
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and apprehension of the difference between him and us, as well as between him and the other creatures? Now if I conceive God to be eternal, almighty, omniscient, supremely holy, righteous, good, gracious, merciful, faithful; if I am at the same time sensible how frail, how weak, how ignorant and fallible I am, and from this consideration there arise in me an humble and awful idea of his infinite grandeur; I adore him. Would you then, my friends, adore the Most High; oh study to understand him and his glory. Frequently interrogate yourself, Who is God? Who am I? What prerogatives has the deity above me, and above all other things that are without him? Is he not almighty, supremely wise, supremely good, &c. What relations does he bear to me and all the world, or what is he with reference to me and to the whole world? Is he not my creator, and theirs; my preserver, my benefactor, my lord and judge, and theirs? But take especial heed, my friends, that you do not stop short at these general ideas, or rather at these words which express general ideas; otherwise you run the hazard of thinking but little or not at all about them. Rather strive to trace the outgoings of the antient of days, to be acquainted with the particular demonstrations of the omnipotence, of the wisdom, of the goodness, of the glory of God, in the creation, providence, in the redemption, which you will

will find in yourself and in all surrounding objects. Search out the particular traces of these attributes of the deity ; call them articulately and impressively to your mind ; and that you may not lose yourself in these vast and viewless tracts of country, you must likewise here set bounds to your attention. Think one while upon this, and then on another specific attribute of God ; now on this, and then on the other particular demonstration of it : thus will your ideas of it be clear and perspicuous ; they will make impression on your heart, and produce in you sentiments of admiration, of humility, of reverence. If you do this, and frequently repeat these exercises of rational devotion, it will certainly not prove difficult for you to express these thoughts and sentiments in appropriate terms ; and when you have exhausted your own reflections, you will at one time exclaim with the psalmist, O Lord, how manifold are thy works ! in wisdom hast thou made them all ; the earth is full of thy riches. At another, you will say with the prophet, The Lord is the true God ! he is the living God, and an everlasting king ! he hath made the earth by his power, he hath established the world by his wisdom, and hath stretched out the heavens by his discretion. At another again : Who shall not fear thee, o Lord, and tremble at thy presence, which hast placed the sand for the bound of the sea, by a perpetual

tual decree, that it cannot pass it ; and though the waves thereof toss themselves, yet can they not prevail ; though they roar, yet can they not pass over it ! There is none like unto thee, o Lord : thou art great and thy name is great in might. Who would not fear thee, o king of nations, for unto thee doth it appertain ? And at length break forth in the heavenly anthem : Thou art worthy, o Lord, to receive glory and honour and power ; for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are, and were created ! Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty ; just and true are thy ways, thou king of saints ! And this is adoration of God, this is to offer him praise. Certainly a noble, a blessed, an easy employment to him that has a proper apprehension of God, and exercises himself in meditations on his glory !

The second part of prayer is thanksgiving for the good we have received from God, or the declaration of our joy on account of it, and our readiness to do the will of our benefactor, and to make him just returns of love and gratitude. If we would acquit ourselves of this duty to God in a rational manner ; if we would give scope to our own feelings on the subject, and express these feelings in our own words : we should in like manner exercise ourselves in reflection ; in reflection on such objects as cannot but be agreeable to us. We should accustom
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ourselves to take notice of all the instances of divine goodness and mercy we have experienced and are constantly experiencing. We should enumerate the whole stock of benefits and blessings which we possess as men, as christians, as members of domestic and civil society ; expatiate one while upon this, and then upon other parts of it ; and bear in mind, the necessity, the high value, and the great utility of the benefits we have received of God. Life, health, faculties, education and instruction ; agreeable and useful connections with other persons ; beneficial effects of our labour and industry ; events particularly fortunate to the state and to the church ; knowledge of God ; forgiveness of sins ; ability to do good ; abstinence from evil ; preservation from dangerous deviations ; hope of eternal life ; all this and much more belong to the catalogue of divine bounties, for which we should testify our joy and gratitude to the Most High. We should therefore frequently recollect them in retirement, attend to the sources whence they flow, and consider how much they contribute to our present and future happiness. We should compare our condition with the condition of those who are more or less destitute of these advantages. We should say to ourselves : What am I indebted for to God, as my creator, as my redeemer ; what with regard to my temporal, with regard to my spiritual life, with regard

gard to my outward condition ? How manifold, how great, are the benefits I have received from him, and am daily receiving ! How unhappy should I be, had I not such or such capacities, faculties and advantages ! How happy am I now, that I possess, and not only possess, but also can use and enjoy them ! Have I however merited them ? Could I have demanded them of God as my due ? Are they not pure effects of his free grace and bounty ? If we engage in such considerations as these, my friends, and then feel, for instance, the value of health, or call to mind the many comforts and satisfactions we enjoy by means of health, and the variety of useful and important matters it enables us to perform : shall we find it difficult to lift up our heart to God, and say : Praised be thy goodness, o Lord, that thou not only causest me to live, but also to enjoy my life ; that thou grantest me to employ my bodily and mental powers unimpeded and with good success, and to do what I ought to do with pleasure and satisfaction. Oh how can I better thank thee for these mercies, than by applying my health and my powers as is agreeable to thee, and useful to my brethren ! When we farther acknowledge the abundance of the grace which God has conferred upon us, in bringing us to the knowledge of himself and of his son ; can it then be difficult for us to express our joy on the occasion, and to testify it by these

these or similar words: How happy am I, o God, that I know thee, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent: that I understand to what end thou hast created and designed me, and what I must do to obtain thy favour! How happy, in knowing that thou art gracious to me for the sake of thy son; and that, if I believe in him, love and obey him, thou wilt raise me to a blessed immortality! How could I have sought and found the way to truth and virtue, how have known it to be the path of true felicity! How could I have allayed the perturbations of my mind both in life and death, if this light had not enlightened me, if I had not been favoured with this consolation and this hope! Yes, o my God, to thee and to thy gracious revelation am I indebted for all these inestimable benefits. To use them aright shall be my constant, my grand concern. In a word, if we reflect how frequently we have erred and strayed, to what dangers we have thus been exposed, and how affectionately God has called us back by his word, by the disposals of his providence, by certain particularly remarkable and affecting contingences, and brought us again to the path of virtue; can it be difficult for us to praise God for his long-suffering, his patience, his veracity; and, moved with sentiments of gratitude, to say to him: Ah gracious and merciful Lord, thou hast pitied me like a father; thou hast
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snatched me from ruin ; thou hast brought me to a sense of my follies, when I had forgotten thee and my duties, when I had allowed sin to gain the dominion over me, and hast restored me again to liberty ! Without thy grace and thy providence, I had been a prey to my lusts, and a spoil to corruption ! To thee I consecrate anew my life ; I am thine, for thou hast redeemed me, o Lord, thou God of truth ! And thus it is, my friends, with all other instances of divine benignity. Only form lively apprehensions of them in your minds ; call to remembrance the several circumstances that enhance their value ; enjoy the benefits you possess, with reference to God, from whom they spring : then will you find it both easy and pleasant to give due praises for them to your infinite benefactor, and you will stand in need of no foreign assistance in this natural and blessed employment.

The third part of prayer, is the personal petitions we put up to God, for all the requisites to our happiness. How peculiarly easy must this department of prayer be to a reasonable man, to a not absolutely ignorant and unfeeling christian ! Who is so perfect, who is so happy, as to have no more desires and aspirations after a higher degree of perfection and happiness ? Who can be sensible to any defect or to any affliction, that is not eager to address him whom he knows
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is able and willing to do for him more than he can ask or think ? No difficulties will here occur, but such as may be overcome by reflection. If we would have our petitions reasonable and acceptable to God ; if we would have them earnest and sincere, and unless they be so we cannot promise ourselves that they will be received : the two following particulars are to be observed. We should above all things study to acquire a just sense and apprehension of our ourselves and our real wants. We should endeavour to form adequate conceptions of happiness, and to distinguish what is requisite and necessary to it, from what does not peculiarly belong to it, but can only adventitiously contribute somewhat to it. To this end, we should consider ourselves, not only as creatures endowed with animal life, who are to live only a short time here on earth ; but as creatures who have a rational and immortal spirit, and are capable of an everlasting happiness. We should revolve in our mind all that is in this respect worthy of our desire, and discriminate the necessity and the utility of it. We should reflect on our various obligations, and consider how far we correspond with them and how far we do not. We should frequently ask ourselves : Which can I least dispense with as to my happiness, the grace of God, or the favour of mankind ; unstable riches, or the permanent trea-

sure of good works ; the health of this earthly body, or the health of my immortal soul ; the applause of men, or the approbation of God and my conscience ? Which is the greatest of all the dangers that threaten me ; the danger of losing my honour, my property, my life ; or the danger of sinning, of persisting in sin, and so to displease God, and to make shipwreck of my salvation ? In which of the virtues am I most deficient ? Which of my duties do I most frequently transgress ? What is particularly wanting to me for worthily bearing the name of a christian, and for promising myself with full assurance the reward of it in the future world ? Having acquired these perceptions, we should endeavour likewise to gain a proper sense of our wants, our defects, our weakness. We should represent to ourselves in a lively manner the necessity of the divine grace and assistance. We should think : How can I be happy, unless God be gracious to me, and forgive me my sins ? How can I stand in the hour of temptation, unless he guard and support me ? How can I answer my obligations, unless he grant me ability and succour ? If we enter upon such considerations, my friends, and raise such emotions within, we shall certainly feel inclination and impulse enough to present our petitions to God in a manner agreeable to him. All that relates merely to our outward welfare, we shall entirely

entirely resign to his unerring wisdom ; and in that respect desire nothing more than that he would grant us according to his judgment and benignity what is actually useful and salutary to us, whether it be agreeable to our wishes or in direct opposition to them. But, for his grace and the forgiveness of our sins, for preserving us from moral turpitude, for ability in moral goodness, for growth in knowledge, in faith, and in virtue, for a truly christian and good heart, for a soothing expectation of the felicity of heaven ; for such solid and lasting goods as these, we shall offer up our supplications at the mercy-seat of heaven with the utmost fervency of desire : and the lively sentiment of the necessity and infinite value of these benefits, will teach us far better how to petition for them, than can be done by any prescribed forms or rituals whatever.

The last department of prayer is intercession, whereby we discover the interest we take in whatever relates to our fellow-creatures, and implore for them the grace, the blessing and the assistance of the Most High. Would we render ourselves expert in this particular, my friends, we should often call to mind our various and intimate connections with the rest of mankind. We should at times specifically represent to ourselves, their several conditions, their spiritual and corporeal wants, and endeavour to confirm

and strengthen in our hearts the sentiments of benevolence and friendship due to them. We should frequently institute these or the like considerations : All mankind are my brethren ; they have the same wants, the same defects, the same infirmities, that I have ; they are liable to the same dangers to which I am exposed. Many, ah probably the generality of them, are still more indigent, more feeble, more wretched than myself. Here I perceive whole nations still sitting in the thickest darkness of barbarism, of idolatry and superstition, and ignorant of the way of salvation. There I behold others to whom indeed the gospel is proclaimed, but with so many commixtures as deprive it not a little of its beauty and efficacy. How many of my brethren are ignorant, unbelieving, blinded by error and baneful prejudices ! How many are slaves to their animal ~~instincts~~ ^{instincts} and passions ! How many are doubtful, and still fluctuating between virtue and vice, between God and the world, between heaven and earth ! How many are perhaps at this very instant beset by temptations, to the combating whereof even a peculiar degree of fortitude and courage is scarcely equal ! How many are sighing under the oppression of the mighty of the earth, crouching beneath the burden of poverty and destitution, or writhing under the sense of violent pain ! How many are now struggling with death, and shuddering at the

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the thoughts of judgment and eternity ! Oh if we frequently dwelt on such considerations as these, would it prove difficult to us to fulfil the duty of intercession for all men ? Would it prove difficult to pour out the desires of our heart before God, that he would graciously please to dispel, by the light of truth, the darkness which still covers the greater part of the globe ; that he would amplify and extend the kingdom of his son, put a stop to infidelity and superstition and diminish the authority of vice ; that he would enlighten the ignorant, reclaim the vicious, bring the wanderer home to virtue and inward peace, support the tempted, confirm the doubtful and irresolute in faith and probity, relieve the oppressed and the wretched, succour the afflicted, and console the dying ? If we know not how to do this ; if we know not how to pray for our neighbour ; then, either a want of reflection, or a gross indifference to our brother's welfare, must of necessity be the cause of it. Strive to remove that obstruction, and you will soon comply with this duty without reluctance ; you will perform it with cordial delight. Would you, for example, pray for your teachers or for the magistrate ; figure to yourself circumstantially, the numerous and burdensome duties incumbent on the teacher and on the magistrate ; how much wisdom and discretion, how much fortitude and integrity, are requisite to

the discharge of those duties, and how many impediments and difficulties they meet with, no less in their own infirmity than in externals, in discharging the functions of their office and vocation at all times and in all respects. Represent to yourself the necessity and the manifold usefulness of the magistracy and the ministry; consider the advantage of order, of security, of quiet, of instruction, of consolation, for which you are beholden to them; and compare with it the dreadful evils which the abolition of these stations, or a deficiency of deserving persons to fill them, would occasion in society; and certainly you will never feel either a want of excitation or of matter for your intercessions in behalf of the guides and guardians that are set over you both in spirituals and in temporals. And these, my friends, are the primary rules and exercises we have to lay down and observe in regard to the various parts of prayer, that happy medium of divine communications, if we are desirous of learning to pray from the heart.

Before I conclude, allow me to add, in few words, some particular precepts of christian prudence for facilitating this employment.

As far as you are able, never enter upon prayer, without some previous preparation, shorter or longer according to circumstances. Collect your mind from distractions, reduce it to tranquillity and silence. Begin by reading^{*} in the word of
God,

God, or a passage from some edifying book, or some animating parts of the liturgy, for composing your attention, and fixing it on the objects that are now to employ you, Ask yourself: What am I now proceeding to do? With whom am I going to converse? What am I in want of? What do I desire? In what particular circumstances do I now find myself? What materials for prayer can I collect from the just past or the just approaching time? Into what temptations may I probably fall to-day? What business have I to provide for to-day? With what kind of persons am I to have intercourse to-day? What particular benefits has God vouchsafed me this day, or this week? What faults and sins have I been guilty of within that period? Of what ought I particularly to beware, what must I do, that I may not commit them again? &c.

Farther: think not that a prayer, for being acceptable to God, should necessarily be prolix, or that it must always comprize in due order all that relates to it, even in the minutest circumstances. Most of the forms of prayer we find in the sacred writings are short and of various contents, and even the model which Jesus gave his disciples is succinctly drawn up. One while you may be chiefly employed in the adoration and praise of God, then in thanksgiving for his benefits; one moment in praying for grace and help,

help, and then again in prayer and intercession for others.

Yet more: think not that choice expressions merely, or that a certain artificial eloquence, is requisite for praying to God in an acceptable manner. No, here sincerity and earnestness are the main concerns. We have to do with a God, who looks not at accessories, which are not perhaps in our power, but only at the heart of him that prays.

Are you subject to vagrancy of mind, to distractions on such occasions; to preserve yourself from them, pray in an audible, or rather, to avoid all appearance of hypocrisy, in a just articulate voice, not merely in thoughts, but in words distinctly expressed. In this design, at times make use of good forms of prayer, that you may have something before you, on which to fix your attention. But first read over these forms, merely for instruction, as you read any other edifying composition. Strive thoroughly to understand every sentiment and term they contain; compare them carefully with your present condition; alter them, either in your mind or upon paper, so as to adapt them to your specific wants and occasions; make them by this means your own; in the use of them pay more regard to the matter than to the expressions; and use not frequently the self-same form, lest it become too familiar to you and slip through
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your mind without observation, and you repeat a customary set of words to which you pay little or no attention.

Lastly, be not satisfied with praying at certain stated times. This is doubtless highly proper and necessary ; but it is not possible that we should always be exactly at these particular times in that frame of mind which is most favourable to devotion. Whenever therefore you perceive yourself in that frame of mind so propitious to devotion, exercise yourself in prayer, unless some other duty of greater importance call you from it. Especially have recourse to prayer whenever any particular doctrine of religion has made upon your mind a deeper impression than ordinary ; when you have a stronger sense and apprehension of your weakness and the necessity of the grace and assistance of God than usual ; when you are under the pressure of any particular trouble ; when you are affected by any especial instance of God's goodness ; or when you perceive more clearly than at other times the value of ~~some~~ benefit you have long possessed, and experience a more lively satisfaction on its account. At such times it will be easy for you to pour out your heart before God. At such times you will find a charm in these acts of worship ; they will become delightful to you ; you will acquire a greater aptitude in them : and this charm, this aptitude, will put you in a condition

dition more easily to obviate any hindrances to devotion you may meet with at other times ; and at length you will advance so far, that, agreeably to the precept of the apostle, you will pray without ceasing ; that is, you will on all occasions elevate your heart to God with joy and confidence, and thus maintain an uninterrupted correspondence with him : a state, my friends, which is the nearest way to perfection and happiness, and to enter upon which we can never too zealously strive. Oh that all of us may run that way, obtain the prize we run for, and be able from experience to say with the psalmist : It is good for me to hold me fast by God, to put my trust in the Lord.'

SERMON XVIII.

On Public Diversions.

GOD, who art our kind and gracious father, readily dost thou grant mankind thy children every harmless and innocent satisfaction. Thou even givest them the fullness of pleasures ! Sensual pleasures, intellectual pleasures ; domestic and social pleasures ; pleasures of the present and of the future life : all pleasure comes from thee, it is thy special boon ! Thou makest us susceptible of it, thou openest to us the sources, thou suppliest us with the means and the faculties for the enjoyment of it. Thanks and praise be to thee, the dispenser of joy, for every agreeable and delightful emotion that has ever entered our heart ! — Who would not think on thee with cordial satisfaction, with alacrity lift up his mind and his heart to thee ! Who would not love thee, the kind and bountiful parent of man ! Who not make it his most earnest wish to please thee and to do thy will ! — Oh might then every joy
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thou grantest us lead us to thee by rendering us more attentive and zealous in the discharge of our duty ! Then should we fix our regards continually upon thee, never withdraw from thee, never exceed the bounds of moderation. Then would our amusements be perfectly innocent and well-pleasing unto thee. Then would not sin so frequently turn our entertainments into folly, nor remorse and reproaches embitter their enjoyment. Ah Lord have patience with us, thy frail and feeble children ! Conduct us back to the path of duty and virtue when we have deviated from it. Teach us now with calm and quiet minds to reflect upon it, and let these reflections be sanctified to our improvement ! We present our supplications to thee for these blessings as the confessors and followers of thy son Jesus, whom thou sentest upon earth to be our leader and forerunner, in whom we may safely trust, in whose foot-steps we may confidently tread, on whose promises we may securely rely ; whose destiny has decided ours ; who is gone before to prepare for us a place in the celestial abodes ; and hereafter will come again and receive us to him, that we may abide with him for ever ; and in his blessed name and words we conclude our petitions. Our father, &c.

JOB i 5.

And it was so when the days of their feasting were gone about, that Job sent and sanctified them, and rose up early in the morning, and offered burnt offerings according to the number of them all: for Job said, It may be that my sons have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts. Thus did Job continually.

JOB is represented in our text as a man on whose heart and conduct religion had a very powerful influence, and who considered all he did himself and all that others did, as it might be agreeable or disagreeable to God. He hindered not his sons and daughters from assembling on certain days for social pleasure, nor when there from indulging in festivity and mirth; doubtless their satisfaction and his own were the same. But he knew how easily the bounds of moderation may be exceeded; how soon sensuality in such assemblies gets the upper-hand of reason and conscience. He knew, that there are no flagrant errors and excesses from which a man is secure, when once he loses sight of God and his path of duty. The good father therefore when a day of festivity and entertainment was over, was wont to send for his children, and sanctify or prepare them for the approaching sacrifice, and then make his burnt-offerings the following morning, according to the number of his sons. For he thought within himself: My children

children may have gone too far in their mirth, they may have forgotten God and sinned against him. And this was his constant practice. It was not enough for him, that he lived in the fear of God and eschewed evil, but he wished and strove all he could that his family might do so likewise.

A noble example, highly worthy of imitation to all fathers and mothers, to all teachers and leaders of mankind! An example that I purpose, my christian audience, to lay before you to-day. What Job did by sacrifice, I would the rather do by instruction and persuasion, as on one hand we are just returned from the enjoyment of various diversions and amusements, and on the other are now to prepare for solemn acts of worship.

You know, my pious hearers, that I am no enemy to mirth and social entertainment; that I interdict you no kind of diversion, so long as it is innocent and harmless; and am by no means desirous of raising you to an imaginary perfection, to such a pitch of acting as the present strengths of nature must not pretend to. And how could I do so without forgetting what the human creature is, and what spirit breathes throughout the christian doctrine?

Man is not merely body, neither is he altogether spirit, but a compound of both; not entirely of earth, but not entirely celestial; is adapted

as well to agreeable, animal feelings, as to abstract rational reflection; is not designed barely for a contemplative but for a busy, not for a solitary but for a social life. And why should he lock up his emotions in his own breast? Why not express and communicate to others his joy, his hope, his benevolence, his participation in the happiness of other men, by words, by song, by gesture, and by various other means? —

And the spirit of christianity, my friends, is a spirit of liberty and good humour. It is the design of christianity to improve and calm the heart, to fill it with the love of God and man; and if it effectuates this, we shall neither do any harm, nor cease to be innocent and good, whether we enjoy sensual or intellectual pleasures; and if it does not produce this, if our hearts remain perverse and evil, the severest abstinence, the most frequent exercises of devotion, will nought avail; we may be called christians, perhaps be proud of that title, and yet experience none of its power and its blessed effects.

At the same time it appears to me highly reasonable and fitting, my devout audience, that at certain seasons of the year, all public diversions, all entertainments of a particular kind should be suspended, and that a greater abstraction and silence should prevail; such as in the present season of Advent and during Lent. I am well aware that these restrictions are not
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founded on any divine injunction, but are merely human ordinances; that these seasons are in themselves no holier than others; that we acquire no merit in the sight of God by abstinence from those gratifications; and that, at times, it is accompanied with a constraint that cannot properly consist with christian freedom. It may also very well be, that superstition had originally more share in these institutions than a perception of the moral utility they may have. Had the authors of this institution been moved to it by that perception arising from a just knowledge of the human heart, I should even at present bless their memories, and honour them as wise benefactors of their brethren. —

However, be this as it may, it is highly proper that there should be times when mankind have less opportunity for dissipation than usual; when, by the greater stillness that prevails in society, they may have more excitation and more leisure to reflect; when they shall be induced, by the deficiency of certain entertainments, to look about them for others, probably more dignified and lasting, to become conversant with them, and thus acquire a taste for their enjoyment. Of this nature is the present season, my devout hearers. May we all apply it to that end!

Indeed the season of Advent is not a time for sorrow; it reminds us rather of the most salutary,

tary, the most joyful event that ever happened, the arrival of Jesus in the world, and all the beneficial changes and reformati^ons that have been and are still daily effected by it among mankind; but it ought always to be a time of serious and calm reflection; and the more frequently we then betake ourselves to retirement from the distractions of the world, the more we meditate on the happiness and the blessed effects of christianity, and endeavour to experience its efficacy and its comforts, the more joy will this season certainly procure us, which we may then by a fair valuation compare with other kinds of joy, and learn to prize them according to their intrinsic merits.

For promoting this design, permit me now to give you a few helps to such serious thoughts, to reflections on the social amusements and diversions you have enjoyed, and on the suspension of them which now takes place.

For I also, your friend and teacher, my christian audience, cannot be free from concern on your account: it may be that they have sinned, and forgotten the Lord their God!

Be not startled at these reflections. They are not intended totally to deprive you of such satisfactions, or to make you any undue reproaches for having enjoyed them; but to rectify your notions of them, and to render you in their enjoyment more moderate and discreet.

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And how ought a man to reflect on the social pleasures and entertainments that he has enjoyed and which are now suspended? He may propose to himself divers questions in this respect; and the impartial answers to them will furnish him with various inferences and rules, that may be of service to him in his future conduct.

The first and most natural question a thoughtful christian proposes to himself, on retiring from the tumult of social amusements, is this: Are these pleasures that indeed for which they are commonly held? Do they completely answer the expectation we are apt to form of them?

When I consider the preparatives that must be made for them; the avidity with which they are longed for; the honour and cordiality imagined to be shewn to such as are permitted to share in them; the uneasiness consequent upon being kept away from them by some trifling accident; when I see the bright contented countenances of all that enter such companies, and the friendly salutations that mutually pass between the members of the party; all tells me how great, how general, the expectation of the liveliest pleasure is.

Neither is that expectation in fact ill-founded; here is no want of a variety of real pleasure. To find oneself in a numerous brilliant company, where mirth and freedom reign; where it
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is not the gravity of advanced years that gives the tone, but the sportive and complacent manners of the young and gay ; where pleasure and delight appear in so many various forms ; where each presents himself to others on his best, his fairest side, and gives a grace to every look and every movement of his person ; where each does all he can to please the rest ; where the ordinary restraints of social life are set aside, and familiar, animated conversation takes their place ; where conspicuous elegance and beauty win the suffrages of all ; where every gloomy thought is chased away by choral music and the festive dance, and every heart expands to agreeable sensations ; in such society pleasure, doubtless real pleasure, may be expected and found, by all that are not totally insensible and indifferent to this species of it. Even the man of riper years, even the sedate and grave philosopher, though not directly partaking of it, yet if of a humane and cheerful disposition, even he must rejoice in beholding so many of his fellow-creatures elate with satisfaction, and amid the effervescence of their joy, still keeping within the bounds of moderation, of innocence and decorum. —

True however as all this is, my pious hearers, yet the reflecting man, on coming home to his retirement, has still reason to ask his heart : But have then these entertainments and diver-

sions entirely come up to my expectations? Did I not previously represent the enjoyment as greater than I found it? Was my heart contented there every moment of the time? Did it feel no want of any sort? Did pleasure entirely captivate my mind? Did it remain to me constantly new, constantly charming? Was there no irksomeness and dissatisfaction mingled with it? Did no little disappointment disturb its enjoyment? Did never languor and lassitude abate my mirth — never one gloomy apprehension steal into my heart? Did not the image of purer superior satisfactions start up before my mind making me feel the absence and want of what delighted me before? Did I never, when stunned by the incessant noise, or reminded by the painful sensation of my exhausted powers, or tired of the narrow compass and the uniform appearance of this pleasure, look forward to the end of it with complacency or rather with impatiencè? And if this is not to be denied, if I have frequently experienced the same, must I not allow, that these pleasures and diversions promise me more than they perform; that their reputation is much higher than their intrinsic value; and that probably their credit would not be long supported, if every one was governed more in his judgment by what actually passes within him, than by the decisions of others, if every one on such occasions

casions had candour enough to declare to himself and others, how he really found the case with him, and what he thought of them, whenever he reflected on them with coolness of temper and composure of mind?

A second question which every man who loves himself, and especially every christian who is urging onward to real and durable perfection, should propose and answer to himself, when he reflects in retirement on this kind of pleasures and amusements, is this: Have they been perfectly harmless to me?

I speak not at present of the pernicious influence, which the too frequent or immoderate enjoyment of them may have, and but too often has on the health, though an object in itself of so much magnitude and importance. This being an injury that we cannot conceal from ourselves; the direct sensation of it, or the example of others that smart under it, irresistibly attract our observation, and loudly admonish us to beware. But the moral injuries, which the imprudent indulgencies in such pleasures may occasion, which do not strike us so sensibly, which work more in the dark, if we would that the generality of mankind should see and judge of as they ought, we must first teach them to reflect.

And here it is not enough that in the common acceptation of the words we do no harm;
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that we commit no flagrant outrage, no heinous crime, do nothing repugnant to decency and good manners, and which could not easily be done in well-bred company and consisting mostly of well-meaning persons. No, the wise man and the christian, who endeavours to preserve an innocent heart and an unsullied conscience; to conform in every particular to the maxims of truth, of order, of christian rectitude and benevolence, and to maintain a complete harmony between his internal state and his external behaviour; who resolves to think nothing, to speak nothing, to do nothing, inconsistent with his character, or that may draw him off from God and the true end of his creation; such an one has much to practise, even on these occasions, has many things to guard against, which escape the notice of the gay and volatile, or are by most men accounted totally indifferent.

The man, therefore, to whom the perfection of his spirit is no less dear than the health of his body, cannot refrain, on such occasions, from putting to himself these and the like questions. In the enjoyment of those pleasures was my mind in a virtuous, composed and godly frame? Were no irregular, forbidden propensities and desires stirring within me; or did I, as they arose, suppress them effectually or reject them with abhorrence? Did I maintain a controul over the blandishments of sense, or give
full

full scope to their influence and yield to their attractions? Did the advantages of person, of dress, of accomplishments, of engaging and winning behaviour, which others had or seemed to have over me; did the superiority in respect and applause, which they had the art to acquire, or which chance or fortune bestowed upon them, excite no envy, no aversion in my breast? Was no tie of social life thereby relaxed, no latent seed of coldness and animosity sown? Did I behold all the beautiful, the good, the excellent in others, with humane and benevolent affection, and regard their satisfaction and their happiness as my own? Did I act with justice, equity, candour, by every one; seek to tarnish no excellence, to disparage no merit, to detract from no good quality, in my companions, from motives of jealousy; turn to ridicule no inoffensive failing, no innocent infirmity; insultingly or maliciously sneer at any outward defect? Was I guilty of no harsh, uncandid, overhasty judgment? Did I degrade myself by no ambiguous, no biting, no contumelious jest? Did I resist every suggestion of vanity and pride, disturb the general satisfaction by no petulance or ill-humour, and shew no scorn, no contemptuous coolness or aversion towards any? Did I in fine sometimes silently lift up my mind to God, honour him in the midst of this delightful scene as my father, who grants
his

his children all innoxious pleasures? Or did I entirely lose sight of him and his will and my relations to him, and banish these thoughts as inconsistent and incompatible with pleasure? To him that cannot satisfy himself on these questions, my devout audience, who has been guilty of such faults, to him the social pleasures and diversions he has enjoyed have not been totally harmless; they have made impressions upon him more or less prejudicial; he has not enjoyed them in an innocent and godly temper of mind, or like a christian ever watchful over himself, constantly on the stretch toward perfection, never unmindful of his obligations, and animated at all times and in all places, with the spirit of truth, of humanity and the fear of God.

However, if we have no self-reproaches to make in any of these respects, and can therefore look back with complacency on those past enjoyments; yet to every one who reflects upon them in the silence of solitude, a third question, of no inferior importance, will naturally occur. It is this: What would be the consequence if I were to use these pleasures and diversions too often? Would they always continue thus harmless to me? Should I always so successfully overcome every temptation to envy, to pride, to vanity; always preserve the same order in my mind, the virtuous, the christian temper and universal benevolence, so unimpaired;

impaired; always secure my heart from levity and folly? Might I not gradually lose all relish for weighty and serious concerns, for whatever is generous and great? Would not at length my acts of divine worship, my exercises of devotion, silent meditation on God and religion, on my present and future appointment, the affairs of my vocation, the discharge of my christian, my civil, my domestic duties, become burdensome to me? Would it not cost me too much time in the adornment of my person, in the preparatives to these pleasures, and in recruiting myself after them? Should I truly enjoy my life, which is already so short and transient? Should I so employ it as becomes a reasonable being, a christian, if I were to give into so many dissipations, and direct my chief attention to frivolities?

And what disorders would naturally hence ensue! Here are the affairs of my calling, which I cannot neglect without manifest prejudice; the proper management whereof demands a disengaged mind, a continued industry and an unwearied application: there are done their affairs, which are seldom to be prostrated and re-out injury, or solely entrusted, anticipation in out waste, which without which thou art thus lay-terference of the master get into confusion. Acquaintance, with whom cated children. in improving, entertaining fami-
liar

of pleasure and entertainment, the springs of which are pure and perennial, whence I may at all times draw and which I can never exhaust ?

Yes, such sources, o man, o christian, there are ! They lie quite close beside thee ; constantly stand open to thee ; will never deceive thy expectations. Here are various means for procuring thyself agreeable and useful knowledge, for making thee more acquainted with the heavens and the earth, with man and the inferior animals, with thyself and all that surrounds thee. Thou hast curiosity. Excite, nourish it ; thou wilt never be able completely to satisfy it ; but neither wilt thou ever seek its satisfaction without delight.

There are thy children, o father, o mother ! Thou lovest them ; thou wishest to see them happy : let them then even now be happy in thy company, in thy converse, and be thou so with them ! And this thou wilt be, if thou there expand thy heart in love towards them, take part in their innocent amusements, encourage their opening reason, furnish them with examples to model their minds upon, plant in their ingenuous hearts the sentiments of piety and religion, and delight thyself by anticipation in their future felicity, to which thou art thus laying a solid foundation.

Here are friends, acquaintance, with whom thou mayst join in improving, entertaining familiar

liar conversation, to whom thou canst open thy heart, in whose intercourse thou mayst learn contentment and wisdom.

There are the poor, the sick, the wretched, the forlorn, whom thou mayst relieve, restore, console ; whom thou mayst assist and advise ; whom probably thou mayst now bring home to God ; and who revering thee as an angel sent from heaven, will implore blessings on thy head ; and this will give thee to know and to feel, that there is no nobler, more godlike pleasure than the pleasure of doing good.

Here is in short religion, which elevates thy mind to God, its origin ; teaches thee to venerate and love thy creator as thy father ; presents thee to Jesus thy faithfulest friend and brother ; unravels to thee all the perplexities of this life ; mitigates all its afflictions ; and gives thee the ravishing hope of a better after death ! Make thyself acquainted with this friend and comforter of man. Let her instruct thee ; let her warm thy heart with the fervour of devotion ; let her be the guide of thy conduct : so will peace abide in thy mind, and confidence and joy will accompany thee in all thy ways.

These, o man, o christian ! these are pleasures and delights, which are the purest, the noblest, the most durable of all. Taste them ; enjoy them : thou wilt always do so with a quiet conscience, always with increasing satisfaction.

And

And then wilt thou assuredly discover that the social pleasures and diversions on which we are now discoursing, are not the only, not the principal solace of life; that they have not quite that value which is usually set upon them; that the defect of them may easily be compensated; and that we should enjoy them with moderation and caution, if we would not forfeit more elevated joys for their sake.

Thus, my devout hearers, thus thinks the discreet and judicious man concerning the public amusements and pleasures which have been lately enjoyed, and are now suspended. Thus does he take reason and experience to counsel, for ascertaining their real value.

And now upon a just estimate of the matter what is the result of all this?

It results: that you, who, on account of your health, on account of your station, or from other causes, could not, or did not choose to enjoy them, have not lost near so much by your absence as you probably imagined. This is what every intelligent or wise man who enjoyed them, and has now calmly reflected upon them, would tell you, were you to ask him. Therefore reckon not yourselves unhappy, that you were obliged to forego them. It is true, you enjoy one kind of pleasure less than others, but you are thereby safe from so many temptations to evil, from so many causes of perturbation and impa-

impatience, from so many dangers of wounding your health or your conscience; you have saved thereby so much time and leisure, so much more freedom of mind to the several nobler kinds of pleasure, the sources of which stand open to all men.

It further results: that not all, probably but few of you, could enjoy these pleasures and diversions without danger and detriment; since not all, since probably but few of you, are so wise, so confirmed in virtue and discretion, as to be able to preserve an absolute self-command amidst the noise and tumult of the liveliest sensual pleasures, or to stifle in its birth every base, unjust, unchaste, or envious thought, and to deny each irregular passion an entrance to the heart. And he that cannot do this, my dear friends, whose heart is open to all impressions, whether bad or good, admits them all: who is so apt to forget both himself and his duty, so apt to lose sight of God and religion; he is on such occasions surrounded by danger on all sides, will always come off a loser, always return home less wise and good; and he ought never to expose himself to those dangers, till he has provided himself with better armour against them. Here it may be said: Can a man take fire in his bosom and his cloaths not be burnt? Can one go upon hot coals, and his feet not be scorched?

It

It results thirdly from the reflections that we have been making on these pleasures and diversions, that you who have indulged in them, and, I hope, innocently indulged in them, may be glad that you are now enabled to collect your thoughts more easily and frequently than before, and may meditate in silence, without distraction, on the weightiest concerns of the man and the christian. It results, that you will manifestly act against your duty, and inimically to yourselves, if, instead of employing this season, when no public diversions are allowed, when all invites you to seriousness and reflection, to such purposes, you seek to repair that defect by other convivial pleasures, which, though less noisy and tumultuous, are to the full as distracting.

Let not this be the case with any of you, my dear friends; but rather turn this favourable circumstance to your profit, in advancing the life, the joy, the perfection of your immortal spirit. And your spirit stands in need of food, refreshment, strength, and recreation. Your spirit too must have its festivals, its days of good cheer. Grant it them now, when you have so many incentives to it. Allow it to reflect more freely, more consecutively, more composedly, on its nature and appointment; allow it the happiness of soaring to God, its creator, and of more completely feeling and enjoying its immortality!

And

And how great the benefits, the blessings, which we are now reminded of by the advent of Jesus into the world and the commemoration of his love in the sacred supper ! Let, then your rational, your immortal mind, contemplate these benefits, enjoy these blessings, and delight itself in God ; that, with affected and grateful hearts, with christian gladness, with invigorated hope, you may celebrate the memorial of Jesus on the festival of his birth and at the table of his love, and there render the praise and the glory to God and to our saviour which such benefits justly demand.

It results in the last place from the reflections we have just been making on the public diversions that have been enjoyed and are now suspended, that that is true which I lately told you : To the pure, all things are pure ; to the good and pious everything is harmless. Yes, my friends, extraordinary as it may sound, it is nevertheless true ; the wiser, the more virtuous, the more pious a man is, the more he is animated by the spirit of christianity, the more advanced he is in christian perfection : the more safely, the more quietly may he enjoy all social pleasures and diversions, that are in themselves allowable ; the less detriment or danger has he to fear from them ; the purer is the satisfaction he enjoys in them. The farther, on the other hand, a person is from such a wise and virtuous frame

frame of mind; the more dominion sensuality has over him; the more licentiously inordinate passions domineer in his heart; the more apt he is to lose sight of God and his duty: so much the more dangerous and prejudicial may such pleasures and diversions prove to him; the more ought he to be upon his guard against them, and to watch over himself.

So ill-founded is that saying which we so often hear: Yes, godly folks, or people who are aiming at a superior degree of piety ought not indeed to do thus; they ought certainly to abstain from such pleasures and diversions; if they partook of them, they would doubtless act inconsistently with their character. But we — we poor groundlings, who pretend to no such godliness, we who avow our weakness, we who lay no claim to the gravity of the philosopher, to the sanctity of the christian in its strictest acceptation, we may enjoy life, and allow ourselves in many things, which perhaps may not be precisely so right. No, my friends, every innocent satisfaction, however great and lively, is becoming to the real, the eminently good christian, at its proper time and within due bounds; the use, the participation of it is to him entirely optional: and if he do not use it, if he voluntarily take no share in it, he acts so, either because he does not clearly understand the true nature of christianity and cordial piety; is

is not conscious of his liberty and has scruples about these matters; or because he has no relish for this sort of pleasure, and knows and loves other kinds, to which he gives the preference.

No, to you alone, who are still always halting between virtue and vice, are inclined one way to-day, and to-morrow another; to-day account religion and christianity important objects, and to-morrow will think no more about them; are one while making some attempts to gain the mastery over yourselves, and then giving the rein to your lusts; to you alone, who nevertheless think they belong peculiarly to you, are gaiety and diversions dangerous; to you they may easily become pernicious; you should therefore use them with the greatest circumspection. be moderate in their enjoyment, exercise yourselves frequently in a voluntary abstinence from them; and think not that, after having long addicted yourselves to these pleasures, you will then begin to be real, intrinsically good christians; but rather resolve to acquire a truly christian temper, and establish yourselves in virtue and piety, that afterwards you may the more safely enjoy these pleasures, and retain, during the enjoyment of them, an innocent heart, pervaded with the love of God and man, and animated with truly christian mirth. May this be the determination, the earnest endeavour of you all!

Preached in Advent, Dec. 15, 1776.

SERMON XIX.

On Public Diversions.

GOD, who art the father of us all, and hast made us all of one blood, thou hast designed us for social life, given us the faculties, impulses and tendencies of mind to that state, and connected a great portion of our pleasure and our happiness with it. We are formed to impart mutually our sensations, our sentiments, our reflections, our joys and our sorrows to each other; mutually to communicate our perceptions and energies; mutually to render our journeys through life more easy and agreeable, and thus to promote the welfare of each other. But here also should wisdom and religion be our guides, continually reminding us of our superior appointment, and allowing us to do nothing that might detain us from it. To become progressively wiser and better ourselves, and to render our brethren wiser and better; should be the rule and the aim of our social intercourse with them. This is thy will, o God; and thy will is

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truth and felicity ! Never can we deviate from it ; never follow it with constraint and reluctance, without doing injury to ourselves. And yet are we inconsiderate and thoughtless enough frequently to place it out of view, frequently to transgress the bounds of moderation with regard to social pleasures, to convert the means into an end, and to abuse to folly and iniquity that which should lead us to wisdom and virtue. Come then to our assistance by thy good spirit, o merciful, heavenly father ! Teach us to entertain and cherish better apprehensions of what we ought to be and to do according to thy gracious will. Grant that we may constantly keep the whole of our destination in view, and that one duty may be as sacred and inviolable to us as another. Grant that we may enjoy whatever terrestrial advantages and satisfactions thy bounty affords us and our sensual appetites procure, with discreet moderation and christian temperance, and especially follow after that which endures for ever and brings us nearer to thee, who dwellest in uncreated light, the eternal fountain of happiness and joy. Bless in this view the meditations we are now about to begin. Let us perceive and apprehend the truth in all its force, however it may shame and confound us. Harken to our prayer, thou God of mercy, through Jesus Christ, our saviour ; who, knowing our necessities, and in compassion to our infirmities,

taught

taught us in this form to address thee : Our father, &c.

JOB i. 5.

And it was so when the days of their feasting were gone about, that Job sent and sanctified them, and rose up early in the morning, and offered burnt offerings according to the number of them all : for Job said, It may be that my sons have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts. Thus did Job continually.

I RETURN once more, my pious hearers, to a subject that I lately handled. I mean the social pleasures and diversions which, for the present, are discontinued, at least in part, during this season to which our church has thought fit to give the name of Lent. I find it the more necessary to address you again upon it, as what I delivered in Advent has not been rightly comprehended by all, probably may have been perverted by some.

On this I insist, that I am no enemy, any more than religion and christianity are, to mirth and social pleasure ; that I readily allow and heartily wish you all kinds of real joy ; that therefore I do not absolutely reject public, social diversions ; that to the pure all things are pure, to the good all is good ; and that no one has more right to such and all other innocent pleasures, and may enjoy them more safely, than the best, the devoutest christian.

But order, moderation, restraint, discretion, should be observed in all these matters, for rendering them convenient.* And these bounds are but too easily transgressed. If a man hear and believe that some practice is allowable and innocent in itself and under certain conditions, he is too apt to conclude, that he therefore may follow it as often as he has opportunity, provided always, that it do not lead him into follies and extravagance.

This conclusion however is by no means just. Because a matter, abstractedly considered, is innocent and lawful, it does not follow, that therefore it is the best in comparison of others. — It does not follow, that, because I may use it occasionally without hurt, that therefore it will be harmless to me, if I use it often. I may doubtless occasionally enjoy particular sorts of meat, certain kinds of drink, which, if I make my ordinary food and my usual bevrage, will infallibly ruin my health. — Because this man or the other, who is of a sedate temper and a confirmed virtue, may frequent certain diversions, without the smallest injury to his temper or his virtue, it does not thence follow, that I, who probably am of a more pliant disposition, and am not so far advanced in the love of goodness, may do the same with safety. Thus numbers can bear the hardest and the coarsest diet, and expose themselves without danger to the
most

most inclement weather ; while I can do neither the one nor the other without being sick. — In short, because I commit no follies and extravagances, it does not follow that I am performing my duty, and doing the best I can and ought at that particular time.

Nay, if we were not designed for more important purposes ; not capable of a higher perfection, of a purer happiness ; not enjoined many other indispensable duties ; if our time were less short and fleeting than it is ; or if we could undertake and execute quite different things in one and the same period of time : then might we always indulge in the use and enjoyment of what in itself is allowable and innoxious, as much as is now usually done. But even then we should very often have to chuse, not only between the good and the bad, but between the good and the better, between the better and the best ; to set duties against duties, pleasures against pleasures, a greater privation against a smaller, personal and domestic circumstances and wants against general customs and habits of life ; and this certainly would not allow us to partake in all social pleasures, it would lay us under various restraints, and prescribe great moderation in them. To convince you of what is here advanced, and to incite you to this moderation, I shall make a few remarks, partly on the loss of time ; partly on the pernicious influence, which
the

the immoderate enjoyment of social pleasures has on our mind and manners ; and afterwards encounter the pretext that is derived from its rendering mankind more sociable.

The loss of time, occasioned by the frequent enjoyment of social pleasure, is manifest, is undeniable. But, manifest and undeniable as it is, seldom is it thought of, little is it regarded. Of nothing are mankind so prodigal as of time ; and yet nothing is more fleeting, nothing less in our power, nothing weightier in its effects, than time.

We have formerly shewn you how much good or harm may be done in the course of one year. What holds good of one year holds proportionably of one day, frequently of a few hours of the day ; for hours make days, as days make years. But so long as the question relates only to hours, to days, we suppose we are losing little or nothing. We think to preserve the sum total, because we do not throw it away all at once, but only in smaller parcels.

Thus we but too often attend solely to the few particular hours we pass in each separate diversion, in each distinct company. In point of numbers, they may not indeed be very considerable, rarely amounting to above three or four ; and what are three or four hours to whole weeks or years ? But does it then require so much skill in arithmetic to find out, that four hours,
twenty

twenty times taken, amount to eighty hours, and these in one month to six or seven entire days, and in one year to between seventy and eighty entire days? And is that no considerable portion of time; and if they are lost, no considerable loss? And what is become too of all the hours that are spent in the needful preparatives to the enjoyment of social pleasures? Where are the hours, the days, when, satiated and weary with enjoyment, we were not disposed to any serious business that requires exertion and diligence? How the amount of lost time begins now to multiply!

And then in all these hours, in all these days, has nothing beneficial, nothing important, nothing necessary, been neglected? Have the affairs of our vocation, our household concerns, suffered nothing by all this? Has the children's education gone on just as well; the tender, the docile hearts of the little ones, that are now in the youth and elasticity of their minds, susceptible of every impression, are they just as safe from contagion, as successfully trained to wisdom and virtue; have the exercises of devotion been as duly performed, as if these hours and days had not been lost?

And how, my pious hearers, how can the industry, the unremitted application, with which we should labour at our own moral improvement, and our advancement in knowledge and virtue,
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be compatible with this prodigality of time ! — I cannot conceive — I must be plain enough to say it, how much soever it may displease — I cannot conceive, how persons, who go every day into company, who pass all the hours that remain to them from the business of the day in company, how they ever can become wiser and better and more religious !

I am not ignorant, that intercourse with mankind, in itself considered, is an excellent vehicle to wisdom and virtue ; that at times it is more improving than lonely silent reflection. But, for being so, it must be quite differently conducted than it commonly is. The persons we visit are almost always much of our own stamp in knowledge and way of thinking ; hold the same language ; follow the same pastimes with us. And are ordinary conversations indeed so framed, that we may learn much from them, that we may be much the better for them ? How often, throughout the whole year, in many companies, may God and Jesus Christ be mentioned with reverence and sentiment ? How often may profitable, moral, or religious topics be brought upon the tapis, or supported with interest and satisfaction ? How often may consultations be held, in what manner we should act on this or the other critical occasion ; how best correct such or such of our failings, how carry on and promote in concert some good under-

undertaking, what methods are fittest to be pursued in the education of children? And even if such subjects are brought forward, how often is it then the heart that speaks; and how often on the contrary is it only the tongue? Nay, can we deny it, that ordinary conversation not seldom tends more to promote folly and vice, than to serve the interests of wisdom and virtue? I will judge no man; but readily make allowances for all men, will readily and cheerfully confess, that there are good and religious persons amongst us; but this I must say, that the prevailing style in companies affords no proof of it, and that from it, we should conclude exactly the reverse. — — —

I know that serious, religious discourse, is not held to be recreation, but effort and labour; and I shall not deny, that it is often right, often necessary, to make indifferent matters the topics of discourse. — This is, for instance, not unfrequently the case with myself. When I come into company, I have probably past the greater part of the day in reflecting on important concerns; so that I probably feel my spirits exhausted; and it is perhaps proper not to set them in great motion. But is this ever, or is it frequently the case with the generality of us? Numbers are employed all day in merely mechanical, manual, æconomical occupations. This is applicable to almost every person of the other

other sex. Others are engaged in mercantile affairs. These are indeed sometimes and to particular persons, as fatiguing, as exhausting, as any labours of the mind can be ; and such as pursue them stand in absolute need of relaxation and refreshment. But this can only be said of a few, or only of certain times and days. The generality are employed in businesses which demand application it is true, but no intense exertion. The evening therefore comes on them before their spirits are lowered. And if they then leave their faculties idle, if they do not employ them at least occasionally in reflection and in rational exercises of devotion at home, and do not readily turn them in company to important and useful objects, to such as may render them wiser and better ; is it not a real and pernicious loss of time ? Is it not a real waste of the noblest powers, the best opportunities of becoming more perfect ?

And the case is the same, my devout audience, with the other particular : that the too frequent use of social pleasures and dissipations has a pernicious influence on the mind, and promotes an habitual levity of conduct.

We are indeed principally framed for joy, for the contented and cheerful enjoyment of our existence, and all the bounties of heaven, but not for levity ; the former, but not the latter, wisdom and religion are adapted to promote.

Joy,

Joy, real permanent joy is a serious thing ; rises out of sedate reflection and consideration ; is the fruit of a wise, virtuous, pious heart, a heart glowing with love to God and man : levity is the assassin of this joy. — Seriousness is not melancholy ; but neither is true joy noisy and riotous. — Levity is indeed not wickedness, not iniquity ; it is, however, but too frequently the way to both.

And what more promotes this levity than the too frequent participation in social pleasure and dissipations ? It deadens the taste for matters of moment, for serious affairs ; the taste for silent contemplation on God and oneself ; the taste for prayer, for meditation on the word of God, for the exercises of devotion. By it a man grows accustomed to treat and regard every subject, however great or important, only as it may afford amusement to himself or to others. He accustoms himself to consider things only superficially with a transient glance ; to adhere firmly to nothing ; not to dwell upon anything ; not to fathom anything ; to talk of everything, and to know little or nothing ; to pronounce upon everything, without having thoroughly sifted anything ; always to put empty words in the room of sentiments ; or to stifle every sentiment, as it arises, by pressing another upon it, and by a third, — be it word, or look, or thought — immediately effacing every vestige of both.

And

And if now by cherishing such a levity it become paramount in the mind, will it have no pernicious influence on our temper and conduct? How can the doctrines of wisdom and religion, that we occasionally hear, make any stay with us, strike their roots and fructify? How can the mind soar aloft to God, its source and origin, have correspondence with him, and be happy in it? How can such a person arrive at self-knowledge, properly apprehend the dignity of his nature, his superior destination, and qualify himself for it? Are not all these totally foreign concerns, empty and unintelligible words, to the light and volatile, who live always in the tumult of dissipation? Nay, so long as a man flies from himself and quiet, avoids reflection, and reckons the day or the evening lost which he passes by himself or with his family at home; he is all that while studying to be ignorant of those concerns, to be insensible to their value, and continues unfit for whatever is truly great, and makes man radically happy. — — What solid reasons, my pious hearers, for avoiding too frequent dissipation, and for being temperate in the use even of the most innocent pleasures of society?

Let it not be said, that these maxims, these cautions are inimical to that sociableness which is the basis of urbanity and decorum, and which every man ought rather to encourage than impede.

Far be it from me to impede it! Sociableness is undoubtedly beautiful and good; and companies promote it, or may however promote it. We learn in them better to understand and to appreciate ourselves; to get quit of many prejudices which we are liable to conceive against each other; may observe many good qualities and excellencies in persons where we should not have looked for them; may learn to judge of many things less from one side only and therefore more justly; company promotes mutual confidence; it prepares and opens the way to many businesses and connections; we may there often sow the seed of good sentiments and actions; may cherish and strengthen the generous virtues which are stealing into day, and in general may do much good.

But this is what every company does not effect; it is only effected by truly virtuous company; and which is perhaps more rare than we are apt to imagine. For that is not real, dignified, christian company, where people only sit together — often entirely for the sake of enjoying social amusements and pastimes. Much less is that to be called company, where people come together for making a parade of their distinctions; for casting a shade upon others, for humiliating them, for making them feel that they are less rich, less honoured, less beautiful; that they have less taste and wit, less of the elegance

gance and fashion of high life ; when people come together for spying out each other's defects ; for discovering their latent infirmities, and dragging them forth for the finger of scorn to point at ; sifting out of them their smaller or greater secrets ; making sport of their foibles ; abusing their simplicity and openheartedness ; or employing their mistakes and passions as instruments to their selfish views ; or, when people come together, merely for coming together ; for shunning the irksomeness of domestic quiet ; for seeing and being seen ; for learning some new trifling fashion ; or solely for amusing themselves with idle pastimes.

No, that alone is real company, where persons of benevolent affections associate in a useful way ; forget all difference of fortune, station, quality, condition, personal preeminences ; and, devoid of envy, of jealousy, of party-spirit, of rancour, of petulance and satirical derision, esteem and honour all men as they find them, as brethren and as men ; do each man justice ; not only strict justice, but tempered with candour and indulgence,* allow each to pass for his full value, and unmolestedly to exert his particular talents and abilities ; lend their strength to the weak, their understanding to the ignorant ; impart confidence to the timid, shew a better example to the faulty, and sympathize with the virtuous ; rejoice with the merry, and weep

weep with the mourner; make the bad which is seen or heard serve as a warning, the good as encouragement and example; cover and conceal the former, and acknowledge the latter with cheerful applause. This, my friends, is company which renders both ourselves and others wiser and better.

That finally is real, is the best sociableness, when men labour together with satisfaction and zeal for the good of society; and this can be done as well, generally better at home, in one's calling, in one's business, than by frequent intercourse with others solely for the sake of amusement. The mother of a family, who takes upon herself the care and education, to direct the temper and behaviour of her children, and thus forms useful and valuable members for the state, for the church, for the world, who by her softness of demeanour and command of herself, gladdens everybody about her, is not she, though living never so retiredly, far better discharging the obligations of society, than another who, regardless of her children, or negligent of their education, is to be met with in every company, and can converse most agreeably with all she sees?

Doubtless with every appearance of sociableness we may still be unsociable, and with every appearance of unsociableness may be quite the reverse. The former every one is, who seeks
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converse and company for no other reason than because he himself, his business, his children, his family, and calm reflection, are wearisome to him: the latter is every man, who faithfully answers the obligations of his station and calling, and employs his time and his abilities in the most useful manner; but for those very reasons does not appear so often as the other in public or private assemblies, and lives more retired. The former seems to be exceedingly sociable, the latter absolutely the reverse; and yet it is not that man, but this, who really promotes the benefit of society, and corresponds to the utmost with the engagements he has contracted with his brethren. So little therefore does sociableness consist in an immoderate participation in social pleasures and amusements, that it not unfrequently is hostile to it.

We might proceed much further, and yet not touch the extreme. As the generality of persons and companies are constituted, the exceedingly frequent intercourse they have together cannot be advantageous to real sociableness. In order to this, they should be productive of more knowledge and sagacity, more taste for the true, the beautiful, the good, more love towards God and man, more humility and modesty, than they can now produce. — Let not the encouragement therefore of greater sociableness be used by any as a pretext for making frivolity and
idleness

idleness a primary pursuit, for squandering away their time and neglecting their duties, and for continually pursuing the same round of dissipations ?

No, my christian friends, guard yourselves from this too common abuse of a thing, which in itself is innocent and good, but the abuse whereof is so pernicious. — Would you avoid having sooner or later to lament over so many hours and days wantonly thrown away, irretrievably lost and gone ? Would you preserve yourselves from levity and its mischievous effects, and so think and act as rational beings, as men formed for wisdom, for virtue, for immortality, should think and act ; would you gain an affection for your duty and for domestic life, for the pleasure and profit of calm reflection, for the sublime satisfactions of pious exercises and converse with God ; oh then take advantage of the present season, when you have fewer dissipations and diversions to call off your thoughts from these objects. Try it at least, but not only once or twice ; make repeated attempts to see whether you cannot find a relish for these things ; whether you are not more placid, more satisfied with yourself, and the employment of your time and your talents ; whether you do not think more comfortably on God, on the proper business of life, on death and on eternity : and if you find it so, then will you naturally for

the future use greater moderation respecting social pleasures and diversions ; prescribe yourself a stricter regimen, more easily overcome the temptations to exceed it, and thus learn to blend the duties of devotion and religion with the duties of society, the pleasures of home with the pleasures of company, the pleasures of the mind with the pleasures of sense ; and to use and to prize each according to its real value.

Preached in Lent, 1777. Feb. 16.

SERMON XX.

The principal Sources of Infidelity.

GOD, how happy hast thou rendered us through Jesus and his doctrine ; and how much happier still may we become, if we proceed in a constantly better application of thy grace in them ! We know thee, know thee as our father ; know that thou art the self-existent, the eternal, the supremely perfect, the wise, the benevolent creator, preserver, sovereign ruler of heaven and earth ; know that thou art abundant in loving kindness and mercy, even towards frail and sinful creatures, and on their repentance and amendment forgivest them their transgressions ; we know that our spirit is immortal, and that, after this life, a superior, a better life, and in it retributions, awaits us ! And all this, however probable, however reconcilable it might have appeared to the apprehensions of reason and nature, we should not have known, or not have known with competent assurance, had not Jesus proclaimed it to us on the part of thee,

our God ! How far more happy does a firm faith in these doctrines render us, than we could have been without it ! Does it not convey more light, more truth, more harmony and solidity, more certainty and security, into all that we conceive and apprehend, all that we do and all that befalls us ? — And, if we hearken to the commands of Jesus ; follow his example, and submit to the guidance of his spirit : how wise, how good, how resigned, how contented shall we be ! How easy will it be for us to correspond to our obligations, to gain the command over ourselves, to be calm and acquiescent through life and in death ! What delight, what efficacy in goodness shall we feel ! What satisfaction and serenity will abide in our breasts ! What order and consistency reign in our sentiments and affections, in all the parts of our conduct ! How gladly shall we direct our thoughts to thee ! How kindly, how generously and affectionately to our brethren ! With what confidence look towards futurity ! How serenely behold our dissolution approaching ! — And shall we not trust our own experience that this doctrine is from God, the fountain of light, the author of happiness ; that it is the directest, the surest way to perfection and felicity : Shall we not steadfastly adhere to a doctrine that in all respects is so credible, so desirable to every unprepossessed mind and every well-affected heart,

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and is so essentially necessary to our tranquillity? Shall we not revere and love it as the most precious boon of heaven? Shall we not confess Jesus as a teacher of truth, as a helper and deliverer sent from God, as the greatest benefactor to us and to all mankind! Shall we not cordially thank him for all that in this view he did and sacrificed? Shall we not voluntarily obey him? Not joyfully follow him? Not constantly strive to assimilate more and more with him, and thereby to become continually more capable of his superior life, his never-ending glory? No; nothing shall ever lead us astray from this consolatory, this blessed faith. Nothing weaken our reverence and love for Jesus. We find in christianity too much light, too much efficacy, too much consolation, too much felicity, and out of it far too little of all these benefits, to make us exchange it for any system of human wisdom. — Strengthen us, o God, in the faith in thy son Jesus and his divine doctrine, and let our faith be uniformly becoming more lively and fruitful in good works. For these and all other blessings we present our supplications to thee in the name of our beloved Lord; saying, as he taught us: Our father, &c.

2 COR. iv. 3.

If our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost.

THE more thoroughly the causes of an evil are understood, the easier it is to prevent or remove it. The better informed the physician is of the origin of a disease, the more safely and definitively will he set about the cure. Infidelity, my devout hearers, is an evil constantly gaining ground at present, and bringing a host of other evils in its train. It is a disease of the soul, no less dangerous than infectious, and at length is attended by death and utter destruction. But how shall we be able to guard against this dreadful evil, unless we are acquainted with the real causes of it? How can we preserve ourselves from the mortal virulence of this spiritual disease, if the sources of it be hidden from us? If then this knowledge be so needful and salutary, I hope you will not now refuse me your attention, when my purpose is, by the divine assistance to bring you acquainted with the principal sources of infidelity, and to shew you how impure and pernicious they are.

St. Paul says in our text: If our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost. What the apostle would imply from the tenor of his discourse amounts to this; The mosaical œconomy, under which our fathers lived, was, no doubt, involved

involved in many obscurities. There lay as it were a caul over the hearts of the jews, which hindered them from discerning the true purport of the law, and observing the end of the ancient covenant. But we, christians, see with an unobstructed view, as in a mirror, the glory of the Lord. The gospel is a shining light, and we announce it to mankind in plainness and simplicity. If notwithstanding then they are not enlightened, but remain incredulous, the fault lies not in the obscurity of the doctrine that is preached to them, but in the blindness and obduracy of their own hearts. They shut their eyes against the light that is risen upon them, and rush blindfold on their destruction. A truth, devout hearers, that still subsists in the most glaring evidence. We cannot better prove and illustrate it, than by examining somewhat more at large, whence the infidelity, that even at present blinds so many persons and renders them unhappy, derives its origin, and by what means it is in general fostered and maintained. To us, who are confessors of Jesus and his doctrine, it is impossible for this inquiry to be at all indifferent. The more light, the more comfort, the more happiness we seek and find in this doctrine, the greater cause have we carefully to guard against whatever may tend to deprive us of this inestimable benefit; and the more fortunate shall I esteem myself if by the
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divine assistance I should be enabled only to preserve one wavering and doubting christian from the dangerous precipices of infidelity or recover him from his deviations. To this end may the Lord himself bless my discourse, and establish our faith in his well-beloved son, that we may persevere in it even unto the end, and hereafter reap the reward of faithful servants !

Ignorance is the first source of infidelity; ignorance respecting the contents of the sacred writings, and the peculiar doctrines of christianity. How few of those who oppose and reject revealed religion, have ever perused the books that comprise it, with the same attention, the same reflection, the same thirst of knowledge with which we are wont to read other books, on subjects of importance and of near concernment to us ! How few take the proper pains for acquiring definite and just conceptions of the dogmas of christianity, for considering them in their connection with each other, and for examining with impartiality into the evidences of their verity ! The majority content themselves with the obscure, confused, incompetent, and generally false notions that were given them in their childhood, or which they afterwards drew for themselves, not from the fountain-head of knowledge, but from turbid and muddy pools ; I mean from an imprudent intercourse with scorners and vicious persons,

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or from writings wherein truth and virtue, decency and sound morals, are extremely injured by attempts to render them ridiculous. Such persons, on coming to the use of their reason, find manifest contradictions in their knowledge ; they discover some errors in what they hitherto believed and held true ; they perceive that they have blindly and without due consideration, adopted the religion of their fathers ; they see that many others do the same : and thence they fondly and rashly conclude, that religion itself rests on no solid arguments, that they are contradictory, and that it is all an invention of artful men. Their prepossessions, their worldly affairs, their indolence, their attachment to animal gratifications, prevent them from addicting themselves afterwards to sedate inquiry, from collating the results of these researches with calmness and precision, from reiterating them frequently, from sedulously using the necessary means, and from giving ear to the voice of truth, though it never so loudly exclaims against their preconceived opinions, and their sensual appetites. But is it not exceedingly unreasonable to reject a proposition which we do not thoroughly understand, which we have never investigated with proper care, and about the real nature and quality whereof we have never given ourselves any serious concern ?

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Nor is the ignorance of the generality of unbelievers less as to the qualifications that are necessary to a right understanding of the sacred books and to the establishment of their divine authority. Are we to be surprised, that in writings of such remote antiquity, composed in foreign languages, which speak of rites and customs long since discontinued, which relate to ancient events, which were originally compiled for nations and persons whose cast of thought and habits of life, whose taste, whose manners, were so widely different from ours, and into which moreover from the numerous transcripts that have been made of them, many errors must necessarily have crept, particularly as to names and numbers; are we to be surprised, I say, that in such writings, and especially in the translations of them, many obscure passages and various difficulties should be met with, which cannot easily be removed, and to the solution whereof certain kinds of knowledge are requisite, which cannot be obtained without some pains and application? But do the unbelievers possess this multifarious knowledge? Do they not rather betray the grossest ignorance; an ignorance of which people, who set up for teachers, and pretend to enlighten the world, should be ashamed? For what do we find in the generality of their writings, if we divest them of the fallacious ornaments of a wanton
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and often spurious wit? Objections that have been a hundred times answered, to the satisfaction of all impartial judges, and which are reproduced with the same effrontery as if they had never been noticed before: difficulties which immediately vanish, on considering the subject in its true point of view, and together with all its circumstances, and with the necessary knowledge of languages and antiquity: manifest untruths, or such representations of the doctrines of religion, as have not the least foundation in the holy scriptures, and are only the contemptible spawn of fanaticism and error: in short, a multitude of unpardonable sins against history, against geography, against chronology, against the genius and construction of oriental languages and manners; of blunders which are contrary to the first rules of logic and probability, and testify the greatest partiality; of mistakes, some of which are so gross that one cannot comprehend how people who make pretensions to understanding and literature could commit them without malice prepense. But what is this, if it be not wilfully shutting their eyes against the light of divine revelation, and rejecting it without competent knowledge of the matter, from a blindness and ignorance beyond all excuse?

The misrepresentations which have not unfrequently been, and still are made of the doctrines of christianity; the obscurity in which they

they have been involved instead of explained ; and the human commixtures and appendages with which they have been disfigured ; are another source of infidelity which certainly has contributed, and still contributes more to the spreading of it, than is in general imagined. The christian religion in itself is so venerable and amiable ; it is so exactly fitted to our circumstances, our wants and our capacities ; the doctrines which it delivers are so rational, so worthy of God, so important, so refreshing to the soul, and withal so plainly revealed ; the rules it lays down for our conduct are so holy, so consistent, so well calculated to promote the particular and general happiness of mankind ; the rites it prescribes are so few in number, are so easy to be observed, and their import is so level with even the meanest capacity ; the arguments in short, whereon their divine authority rests, are so various, so solid, so incontrovertible, that it is impossible for any unbiassed friend of truth, to understand this heavenly religion in its native simplicity, its original purity, its inherent dignity, without giving his approbation to it, and accepting it as the most precious boon of heaven with gratitude and joy. But, to speak impartially, can we deny that christianity, partly by accident and partly by the weak and reprehensible conduct of its professors and teachers, has lost much of its primitive

tive simplicity and beauty, and that it is still in many places disfigured by sundry errors and interpolations, and proportionably brought into contempt? The generality of mankind have little relish for what is simple, plain and easy. They love the wonderful, the abstruse, the incomprehensible, the mysterious. They are fonder of what sets the mind and the senses at work, than what tends to the regulation of their affections and the amendment of their conduct. They would willingly know much, but practise little. Thus has it fared with the christian doctrine. The peculiar design of it has often been kept out of sight, and itself considered, not so much as a practical, as a speculative and theoretical science. Men have arbitrarily pretended to define matters which the apostles of our lord have left undefined. They have perplexed and obscured its plain and exceedingly comprehensible information on the most important doctrines of salvation, by various unintelligible terms of art, and by a misapplied profusion of scholastic learning. They have altered in part the sacred rites which it enjoins, taken no notice of their natural signification, and converted them into incomprehensible, nay contradictory mysteries. They have unnecessarily multiplied the articles of belief; raised abstruse hypotheses and doubtful propositions to the rank of ascertained and undeniable truths; increased the ceremonies

remonies of public worship to an enormous degree, and thus perplexed the minds and burdened the consciences of christians. The time would fail me, were I to quote instances of it ; they are not unknown to such as are conversant with the history of the christian church and its present constitution. However, who does not see how much all these abuses have contributed, and still contribute, to the progress of infidelity? Does not daily experience teach us, that the greatest part, that the most considerable of the objections produced by infidels, are grounded solely on the misrepresentations that have been given them of the christian doctrine, or on the commixtures and additions with which it has been adulterated in the congregations in which they were born and brought up? But who sees not likewise, that this neither justifies nor excuses the unbeliever? Have we not the writings of the evangelists and apostles in our own hands? Are we wanting in any of the necessary means to a right understanding of them? Is it not incumbent on us to examine for ourselves what is delivered to us as a revelation from heaven, and not to build our faith on the sentences and decretals of fallible men, but on the infallible declarations of the God of truth? Or is it perhaps reasonable to refuse assent to the truth, because it sometimes appears in company with error, or to reject a doctrine for

for no other reason but because it is not always properly expounded ? Would the thirsty traveller refuse to drink of the stream which crosses his path, and which is both abundant and pure, because channels have been cut from it which are lutulent and unwholesome ? And in what a brilliant light especially in our days are the doctrines of christianity placed ! How critically, how impartially have they been examined and demonstrated ! What pains have been spared for purging them from all foreign commixtures, for ascertaining the importance and the degree of certainty proper to each of its dogmas, and to deliver the gospel to mankind in its native simplicity and lustre ? How many excellent writings of this kind have in our own times made their appearance ! Shall we not be culpable then in the highest degree, if we make no use of them, and blame the christian religion for what arises entirely from our defect of knowledge, and the wrong notions we entertain of it ?

Pride is the third source of the prevailing infidelity. Those who suffer themselves to be governed by this vice, are the slaves of vanity. As such they wish to exalt themselves above others ; they want to distinguish themselves from the crowd ; they would be wiser than the rest of mankind. They account it disgraceful, from the high opinion they entertain of their own penetration, to think and to judge as other men do.

do. The farther therefore they keep aloof from the opinions and sentiments of others, the greater and more exalted are they in their own imagination. Hence it is, that they have no relish for truths which are in a manner received and credited by all. Hence it is, that they assent to the most extraordinary propositions without much reflection, merely because they are extraordinary. What is singular and out of the way has so many charms for them, that they grasp and maintain it, without so much as examining whether it be wrong or right, true or false, useful or prejudicial. In like manner as they act respecting the things of this world. Nothing is agreeable to them if it be not extraordinary and rare. They despise what is common, though never so beautiful in itself, never so excellent and beneficial. So likewise do they act with regard to religion. As they reject and deride it now, because even the mechanic and the day-labourer, the meanest among the people, has the happiness to understand and to believe it; so would they profess and maintain it, if infidelity were common and prevalent. But is it not inexcusable folly, in a matter of the highest importance, to pursue a method which no man of sound understanding and judgment would adopt in the ordinary transactions of life? Is the truth or the falsity of a proposition to be decided by the greater or smaller number of its adherents
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and defenders? May there not just as probably be truths which are acknowledged and revered by a great part of mankind, as there may be errors which have spread far and wide over the face of the earth? Is it possible even for common sense to conceive anything more senseless and contradictory than to sacrifice the interests of our immortal spirit, and the hope of everlasting felicity, to the vain desire of distinguishing oneself from others? What should we think of the prudence of him who should leave the plain and safe highway, only because it is plain and safe, and strike off into the most dangerous by-roads for reaching the place to which he was bound?

Pride likewise intoxicates a man by inspiring him with too lofty notions of his abilities, of his vigour of mind, of his penetration, wisdom and sagacity. It conceals from him the narrow limits of our understanding, and the darkness that in many respects surrounds us, while confined to this terrestrial sphere. Having however formed this high conceit of himself, far beyond his merits, and adopted a contempt of others equally ill-founded, he is prone to persuade himself that nothing is too elevated nor too difficult for his understanding. He fondly imagines that what he cannot comprehend must therefore be incomprehensible or even utterly impossible. Accordingly he will admit of no obscurities in religion.

religion. He will allow of no truths that have their dark side, and the evidences whereof do not strike the senses. He rejects whatever he is unable to form a perspicuous and complete conception of. The most credible, the most irrefragable evidence of the reality of a fact or an event, is not enough for him, if he be incompetent to perceive the nature and reason of it, or the manner how it was performed or happened. Now as the christian religion contains some doctrines of which we can have but very imperfect notices, and since they relate to subjects so vastly above the apprehensions of sense, which no finite intellect can fully comprehend ; as they partly relate to marvelous operations, the possibility and reality whereof we cannot absolutely deny, although they confound the greatest subtilties of speculation and we are utterly unable to comprehend how they were done ; as they inform us of several methods and dealings of God, without disclosing to us the particular reasons of them : therefore the infidel, who is under the dominion of pride, refuses to hearken to this heavenly revelation and submit to its instruction. But, how absurd and repugnant to all sense and reason is his behaviour? Have we not daily experience of the incompetency of our understanding and our judgment, how limited our capacities and faculties are? Are there not numberless truths, of the certainty whereof

whereof we cannot doubt, and yet are in many respects incomprehensible to us? Do we not perceive within us and without us innumerable things that are real mysteries to us, so as to fill us with wonder and amazement? Can we clearly explain our own motions, our most natural actions, the generality of the alterations that happen to us, of which we are immediately conscious? Must we not doubt of all things, even of our existence, if we will take nothing for true, unless we can perceive the reason of it? Is it not then criminal pride, is it not preposterous and absurd, to reject a doctrine, the divine origin whereof rests on such abundant evidence, because it contains some things which we cannot thoroughly comprehend, or because we cannot fathom the abysses of the deity which they open before us?

Pride moreover prevents a man from relinquishing the opinions he has once embraced, or retracting the errors he has long maintained. It prevents him from examining afresh a circumstance on which he has before peremptorily pronounced, and pursuing this examination with greater attention and care than he has hitherto bestowed upon it. Should he do this, should he actually change his opinions, he must acknowledge his weakness and ignorance; he must allow that he has been premature and deceived in his judgments; he must grant that

others excel him in perspicacity, in wisdom and understanding. But how mortifying must it be to the proud spirit to make such a humiliating confession, and so far to deny his darling propensity !

In short the whole contents of the christian doctrine are so constituted, that it is impossible for the proud man to have any relish for them. They represent all men as sinners, who act contrary to their duties, who thus render themselves unmeet for the divine complacency and favour, who deserve punishment, who have need of a saviour and redeemer, who are fallen into a state of infirmity and corruption, and are in want of a particular divine assistance for being delivered from it. They deny all merit to man ; they ascribe every endowment we possess to the free bounty, the grace and mercy of God. They place the outward distinctions of power, of riches, of authority, of which mortals think so highly, in their proper light, deprive them of their dazzling lustre, and pronounce them to be objects of small importance. They require us to esteem virtue and goodness more than crowns and sceptres, and to respect and love all men as our brethren. They demand meekness and modesty of us ; they will that we exalt not ourselves over others, that we strive not for high things, never lose sight of our unworthiness and weakness ; that we keep up a constant apprehension

apprehension of our dependance on the sovereign being ; that we pray to God for all real benefits in an humble sense of our wants and demerits, expect all things from him, thank him for all, and put our trust in him alone ; that we be patient in adversity, contented with all things, and never repine at the dispensations of heaven. Are we then to be surprised, that a man who is a slave to vanity and pride, should explode and deny a doctrine so manifestly opposite to his temper, to his affections and views, which requires of him such costly sacrifices ?

This consideration leads us to a fourth spring of infidelity, which no doubt contributes much to the spreading and cherishing of this evil. It is the moral corruption of mankind, the animal lusts and passions by which they allow themselves to be governed ; against which however the gospel declares open war, which it condemns, and which it menaces with the severest punishments. The christian doctrine is holy ; it requires of its professor an upright heart, generous sentiments, honest views, an inoffensive and virtuous conduct. It insists, that he cleanse himself from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God ; that he die unto sin, and live again unto righteousness ; that he add to his faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge, and to knowledge temperance, and to temperance patience, and to patience godli-

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ness, and to godliness brotherly-kindness, and to brotherly-kindness charity ; that he escape the corruption that is in the world through lust, and be a partaker of the divine nature. It demands, that whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report, if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, to think on these things ; that he be a burning and a shining light in the midst of the crooked and perverse generation of this world ; that he be a follower of God, and imitate Christ his lord and master, and constantly strive to copy him more strictly. These, pious hearers, these are what degenerate men have principally to find fault with in the christian doctrine, and urge them to listen to their deceitful hearts, to doubt of its truth, and to reject it with unbelief. If the gospel was to be sufficed with a bare assent to certain dogmas, or with the outward observance of particular rites and ceremonies ; if it allowed mankind to be at rest in their iniquities, and still flattered them with the hope of a blessed immortality ; if at least it connived at their bosom sins, encouraged their darling propensities, how willingly would they give credit to those dogmas, though never so intricate and abstruse, incomprehensible and mysterious ! How zealously would they ob-

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serve those rites and ceremonies, though they were attended with never so much pains and expense ! But the case is quite otherwise. He that will be my disciple, says our saviour, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me. Strive to enter in at the straight gate, for many will seek to enter in, and shall not be able. These requisites, these conditions, are not agreeable to the sinner. This self-denial, this following of Jesus, this striving for eternal felicity, is not to his taste. He cannot resolve on doing any violence to himself, and sacrificing any present fleeting pleasure to one that is future, though infinitely greater. He will rather not be a christian, than buy its privileges at so dear a rate. He rejects the christian doctrine, not because he is rationally convinced of its falsity, but because it is in opposition to his predominant passions. He cannot come up to the demands of the gospel unless by renouncing his darling lusts ; and accordingly, without further examination, he says with the jews, This is a hard saying, who can hear it ? And in fact if a man be addicted to avarice ; how hard must the doctrine appear to him which pronounces a blessing on the poor ; which denounces a woe on the rich, who place their confidence in uncertain riches ; which forbids us with anxious perturbation to lay up treasures on earth ; which enjoins us to be compassionate,

passionate, charitable and bountiful, and not to be weary in well doing ; which requires of us on certain occasions to relinquish all that we have ; that we may follow Christ, and be faithful to truth and virtue ! If a man be governed by pride, how contemptible in his eyes must the doctrine appear, which requires of us not to seek the empty praise of mortals, not the deceitful favour of the great of this world, but the favour and approbation of God, and to make his glory the ultimate aim of all our actions ; that we prefer one another in honour, and perform the most generous actions, such as might acquire us the highest renown, in secrecy, and silence ; a doctrine which holds out the greatest rewards to meekness, and threatens him that exalts himself with being abased ; a doctrine in fine which exposes at times its confessors and followers to the scorn and contempt of the world ! Do anger and asperity prevail in a man ; how extraordinary, how grating must these injunctions of christianity appear to him : Love your enemies ; bless them that curse you ; do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you : recompense to no man evil for evil : avenge not yourselves : let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamour and evil-speaking, be put away from you, with all malice : be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another,

other, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you!" How repugnant are these precepts to the temper and maxims of the irascible and revengeful! Is a man the slave of sensual gratifications; how will he revolt against the doctrine which condemns all uncleanness; which excludes the whoremonger and adulterer from the kingdom of heaven; which commands us to observe moderation and decency in all things, to crucify our flesh, with its affections and lusts, to subdue our body, to preserve it in sanctification and honour, and on peril of the loss of everlasting happiness to abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul! If this then be the case, pious hearers, if the morality of Christ and his apostles be so holy and pure; how can it be otherwise, but that the man who is attached to sin, and will not let it go, must be at enmity with the gospel which condemns and punishes him, and that he should take refuge in unbelief, to calm his mind as well as he can, and to blunt the sting of his conscience. Therefore, our saviour says, Every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reprov'd. He shuns it, because it detects his iniquity and folly, because it brings him to the knowledge of his dangerous and wretched condition, because it excites in him perturbation and anguish, because it condemns his intemperate pleasures, and

and obstructs him in the free indulgence of the furious appetites of his corrupted heart. This is often the lamentable condition of the unbeliever. He rejects and denies the doctrines of christianity, because they are at strife with his sinful affections, and disturb him in his irregular pursuits, in his carnal security. Therefore it is said, Foolish men shall not attain unto wisdom, and sinners shall not see her; for she is far from pride, and men that are liars cannot remember her. And in this respect the apostle testifies: If our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost; in whom the God of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.

But if this be the case, pious hearers, as none can deny, as the writings and the conduct of the scorers and enemies of the christian doctrine evince, if these be the principal sources of unbelief, if it be, in most instances, only the base progeny of ignorance, error, pride and a corrupted heart, what is the result? Can anything good, anything that merits esteem and approbation, proceed from such impure and pestiferous sources? Must not infidelity itself be a great, a dreadful evil, since it is engendered and nourished by darkness and vice! Must it not be criminal in the highest degree,
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since it arises from the vilest passions, from a predominant affection for sin? What then should we lay more to heart than the exhortation of the apostle: Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God? Yes, my worthy hearers, let us resolutely combat this foe to our virtue, our comfort and our hopes; let us manfully resist its temptations and attacks. Let us thus endeavour to prevent this evil, which is daily alas gaining ground, from shedding its baneful effects on us. We should make it our daily, our most delightful employment, to search the scriptures with attention and earnestness, to acquire luminous and just conceptions of their important and sublime contents, and thus strengthen ourselves in the conviction of their celestial origin. We should carefully use the excellent means which divine providence has granted us to this end; and constantly reflect, that ignorance and error, that a superficial and shallow knowledge of religion, is far less excusable in our days, now that the light of truth so clearly shines, than ever it was before. Let us at the same time study meekness and modesty, frequently remind ourselves of our natural weakness, and the imperfection of our present state; and never forget that here we walk by faith and not by sight, and that the thoughts and ways of God are as far exalted above

above our thoughts and ways, as the heaven is higher than the earth. Above all things, let us open our hearts to the salutary influence of the christian doctrine, readily follow its wise and beautiful precepts, manfully contend against every irregular lust and affection that may render the truth either hateful or unpleasant, and with indefatigable industry labour at our moral improvement. So shall we hold the faith and a good conscience. So will the gospel be to us divine power and divine wisdom. Thus shall we learn to understand the excellency of the doctrine of our redeemer from our own experience; and in the knowledge and practice of it, find all that can enlighten and sanctify, sooth and gladden our hearts. Instead of feeling out our way in darkness with the unbeliever, for the most interesting and necessary truths, we shall walk in the light of the Lord. Instead of living like him agitated between hope and fear, and bearing about with us a guilty conscience, we shall be at peace with God, and acquire a permanent tranquillity of mind. Instead of being danced no less than a puppet by foreign impulses, by unruly desires, or uncertain principles and fluctuating customs, we shall find in Christ the most excellent guide to a holy life, to an irreproachable and consistent conduct, and the most powerful support along the path of duty. Instead of seeing futurity approach

us with cruel doubt, we shall build our hopes on an immovable rock ; and death and the grave, judgment and eternity, will have no terrors for us. O divine, o glorious faith, thou procurest us these advantages ! We will keep thee with all diligence as the most precious of treasures. Thy instruction, thy comfort, thy sanctifying power, shall lead us to truth, to virtue, to felicity. To thee will we adhere in prosperity and in adversity, in life and in death, and so shall we never be put to confusion.

SERMON XXI.

Some of the Prejudices against Christianity combated.

THANKSGIVING and praise for ever be to thee, the God and father of our lord Jesus Christ, for having brought us to the knowledge and the belief of christianity, and causing us to find in it so much light, so much efficacy and life, so much consolation and felicity. Yes, every good gift and every perfect gift proceeds from thee ; and among them the best of all gifts, the costliest of all presents, christianity : that just, authentic revelation of thee and thy designs ; that filial hope and trust in thee, our father ; that comfortable assurance of thy grace and favour ; that blessed deliverance from all superstitious fears and slavish terrors ; that liberal, cheerful, generous temper ; that soothing expectation of immortality and everlasting life ! In all these we may as surely conclude from the effects to the cause, from the gifts to the giver, as from the water that we drink and from the refreshment and solace it affords us, to its spring.

Yes,

Yes, may this living well of living waters still more and more assuage our thirst for truth, for wisdom, for virtue, for happiness ! May no anxious doubts, no bad affections ever disturb it or weaken our relish for it ! To maintain in deed and in truth the name of christians ; always more fully to experience the vital efficacy of christianity ; always more to distinguish ourselves by wisdom and virtue, by content and satisfaction, from all who have not the happiness of being christians, and thus to render the doctrine that animates and rejoices us, venerable to others, are now the most fervent desires of our hearts, o God ! Favour their accomplishment by thy wise and gracious providence. Confirm us in the faith in thy son Jesus and his divine precepts, and let our faith be always more lively and fruitful in good works. O Father, let the kingdom of Jesus be daily more amplified and increased, let christianity be more and more cleansed from human commixtures and abuses, and its beneficial efficacy be everywhere more powerfully and gloriously displayed ! — Grant these our petitions, o God of consolation, which we present unto thee as the followers of thy beloved son, and which we conclude in the form he graciously prescribed us : Our father, &c.

MATTHEW xi. 6.

Blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in me.

PREJUDICES have been at all times the most prolific sources of infidelity, and are so still. They deprive mankind, not only of the inclination, but likewise of the capacity for impartial and sedate inquiry after truth. They render it odious to them, or at least indifferent and contemptible; and whenever these prejudices are propitious to animal gratifications, when they coincide with the sordid and low affections of the heart, they soon become predominant principles, against which the strongest evidences can little or nothing avail. At present however by prejudices we understand such judgments of the proper nature and quality of a subject as are formed entirely from certain outward circumstances and fortuitous effects of it, and its value fixed without investigating the subject itself in its essential properties. Were they not such prejudices as these which formerly prevented the jews from recognizing Jesus as the messiah and from believing in him? Instead of examining into the merits of his doctrine, and comparing it with the writings of the prophets, instead of considering attentively his excellent character, his beneficent and holy life, his mighty works, and thence drawing a rational conclusion

conclusion of his divine mission, they attach themselves to some outward circumstances of his person and fortunes ; and imagine they have sufficient cause for rejecting him, because these circumstances do not accord with their preconceived opinions. One while it was his want of a regular and learned education ; at another, the mean and obscure condition of his parents and relations ; afterwards, his frequent abode at Nazareth and in Galilee ; then, his generous concern for the salvation of publicans and sinners, which must furnish a pretext to their unbelief. Some took offence at his personal poverty and meanness, others objected to him because they were acquainted with his pedigree, since, according to their idle notions, no man was to know whence Christ should be descended ; others again allowed themselves to be seduced by their reverence for the scribes and pharisees, who treated him with contempt, to act with the same injustice towards him. And are they not the very same, or similar prejudices, that still prevent numbers of persons from giving their entire assent to christianity, and from hearkening to its commands ? They cannot overthrow the various and powerful evidences on which the truth of the christian religion is grounded ; much less can they oppose other evidences as strong or still stronger, to it : but they find in the circumstances of the promulgation and dissemination

tion of the doctrine of Christ, or in the consequences with which the profession of it has been attended, and is still attended, or in other collateral causes, certain difficulties which they hold of sufficient magnitude for inducing them to reject the doctrine itself, or at least to doubt of its heavenly origin. But the more general and pernicious these prejudices are, pious hearers, the more incumbent it is on us to bring them to a fair and impartial trial; the more necessary it is for us, your teachers, who see their unreasonableness, to guard you against them. The greater, according to the expression of Christ in our text, the blessedness of the person that shall not be offended in him; the more it is our indispensable duty to remove all obstacles that may exclude us from that blessing; and this is the purport and design of my present discourse. I will endeavour by the divine assistance to refute five prejudices against christianity. The first relates to the pretended or real difficulties which are to be met with in the christian doctrine, and in the transmission of the sacred books; the second to the narrow bounds to which christianity is confined on the face of the earth; the third to the diversity of sects, into which christians are divided; the fourth to the bloody wars and the cruel persecutions, to which the dissemination and profession of the christian religion has given occasion; and the fifth to the
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small influence it has had on the temper and conduct of its professors.

We readily admit that christianity comprises various dogmas, which we cannot fully comprehend, or which are involved in certain difficulties, the solution whereof is beyond our abilities. But are we at all to be surprised at this? Or can we on that account reject those dogmas without being guilty of the greatest partiality and inconsistency? What science is entirely free from difficulties? What truth is superior to all objection? Is not our knowledge of the most vulgar and diurnal objects, which are continually before our eyes, extremely imperfect? Are not the essential and elementary properties of them totally hidden from us? Do we not on all sides meet with occult qualities in nature, which we cannot fathom, and which we must yet admit, since our own senses, or the experience of other men, or our own reflections, suppress all doubt concerning their reality? Can we comprehend how our mind thinks, how it moves our body, how it operates in it, how both are connected together? Nay do we not find even in natural religion, which yet can be proved by undeniable principles of reason, just as knotty points, just as insolvable difficulties, as in revealed religion, which rests upon the credible testimony of Christ and his apostles? Or, can we more fully explain the doctrine of

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God,

God, of his infinite attributes, of his works and ways, of his providence and government, than the doctrine of the person of Jesus, of his incarnation, of his meritorious death and passion, of the operation of the holy spirit, and of the future retribution? Should we not then be grossly inconsistent were we to believe the former and deny the latter? Should we not rather, if we would argue reasonably and impartially, thence infer that all these difficulties arise not from the nature of the thing itself, but from the narrow limits of our understanding, and that it is presumption no less ridiculous than criminal, not to admit an interesting truth which has sufficient evidence in its favour, because we cannot perceive it in all its parts, and in its several combinations with other truths, because we can adduce no other argument in behalf of its possibility, than the express declaration of God, who is however truth itself?

We allow farther, that many obscure passages are to be met with in the sacred records, which even the reader that is well versed in them, and furnished with the necessary helps, may be startled at. But will this seem strange to us, if we reflect on the antiquity and the language of these books; if we take into consideration the figurative and hyperbolical phraseology which then prevailed and still prevails among the nations of the east, and which to them was as easy
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and intelligible as it seems difficult and obscure to us ; if we consider how different their manners, their usages, their habits of life, their opinions were from ours? Have we not on the contrary the greatest reason to admire and to praise the divine providence, for adopting such wise arrangements, that, notwithstanding all these natural and unavoidable impediments, we can rightly and without much trouble, understand the greatest and the most important part of these books, and may obtain from them all necessary information concerning the doctrines of religion and christianity, in a satisfactory manner, if we only imbibe this information with becoming attention and with an honest heart? Yes, pious hearers, do but read the holy scriptures actuated by pure motives and upright views ; read them with an earnest and sincere desire of discovering the truth ; carefully discriminate whatever essentially appertains to religion and to christianity, from what relates to less important matters, to incidental circumstances ; attend more to what has a tendency to improve your heart and your conduct, and to confirm your hopes in futurity, than what can serve only to gratify an allowable perhaps, but sometimes an inordinate curiosity ; lastly, beware of arbitrarily determining such points as the holy scriptures have left undetermined, and confound not their expressions with the ingenious

nious and subtile glosses by which commentators have sometimes obscured them: so will the principal difficulties, which now perplex you, fall to the ground of themselves; and you will find that the word of the Lord is a shining light, which will cheer and safely lead us, if we faithfully follow it.

The second prejudice against christianity relates to the defect of a universal revelation of it, and the narrow limits to which it is at present confined. If the christian religion, say the unbelievers, be a divine light to enlighten mankind and conduct them on the way to happiness, why has not its radiance diffused itself over the face of the whole earth? Why has not the doctrine of Christ been promulgated to all the countries of the globe without distinction? Why are there so many millions of persons who have never heard a word of Jesus and his salvation, and who still live in the thickest darkness of ignorance and superstition? How is this consistent with the goodness of God, whose mercy is over all his works; and should we not thence conclude, that revelation is not that for which it is given out? I answer: First, it does not become such weak and ignorant creatures, of such contracted views as we to prescribe rules of conduct to the supreme being, or to expostulate with him who governs the universe. Is he not the sole uncircumscribed proprietor

proprietor of heaven and earth? Does it not rest with him to dispose of his graces and gifts as is most agreeable to him? Shall he not do what he will with his own? Are we, whose understanding is so limited, in a capacity to survey the vast and infinitely extensive plan of the divine administration, and to judge of the fitness or unfitness of his methods, which for the most part do not fall within the verge and compass of our faculties? Nay can we do this, without incurring the guilt of incroaching upon his sovereign prerogatives which may neither be questioned nor controuled? Do we not perceive even in the confederate powers of nature the greatest variety and subordination among the properties, the forces, the preferments, the appointment, the destinies of animate and inanimate, rational and irrational creatures? Are there not numberless gradations of perfection on the scale of things, if we ascend in speculation from the grain of sand to the highest of the archangels? Shall we therefore deny the goodness and wisdom of God, because we perceive so great a diversity among the inhabitants of his immense domain? You ask, why God has not caused the light of his revelation to shine on all nations of the globe? And I ask you, why God has not made the beasts like men, and men like the angels? Why has he granted this man more health, more strength, more understanding

ing, than the other? Why has he exalted one to the highest dignities, to the greatest authority, and left another to creep in the dust of poverty and scorn? Why has one received a good education, and been imbued with sound principles, while the other has been brought up in the grossest ignorance, or left entirely to himself? Why is one born among a civilized and free people, and another in a wild and slavish population? Why has consequently the former so much fewer obstacles, and so many more encouragements and means to promote his spiritual and everlasting welfare, than the latter? You ask, why God has not caused the light of the gospel to shine upon all mankind; and I ask you, why has the light of nature, which has likewise God for its author, and which, according to the assertion of the enemies to christianity, shines so bright, that all other means for attaining to the knowledge of God and religion are unnecessary and superfluous, why has it hitherto actually enlightened only such a small portion of men, and preserved so few from idolatry and superstition? Why was it not able in four thousand years, to exterminate idolatry? Why has natural religion, which is so easily discoverable, never yet been universally prevalent among mankind? and why has it been so speedily and so much obscured, and so immersed in oblivion, that, as far as we know, it is not
purely

purely taught, or completely understood, in any one nation of the earth? Answer first these questions; and then, but not till then, will you have a right to require a complete solution of all the knotty points with regard to divine revelation.

I answer, further: that it is no less unreasonable than ungrateful, to refuse to accept a precious boon, or to think lightly of it, because it is not common to all. Should we not justly account it a mark of fatuity in him who should repine that God had placed him in happy circumstances, because others were less fortunate than he? Will any man reject riches, because there are persons who are poor, and have scarcely the necessaries of life? Will the scholar pronounce his superior discernment and discoveries to be useless and erroneous, will he despise the sciences he knows, because but few comparatively have the capacity and the opportunity for making the same progress in knowledge? Or does reason lose its value, because there are people almost totally deprived of it? But would it not be as senseless and absurd to deny the truth of the gospel, and to refuse to receive it, because the light of it does not enlighten all men without exception? Oh, my friends, let us much rather pour out our hearts in gratitude to the Most High, for this unmerited gift of his free bounty. Let us recognize the great advantage

vantage we possess, and make the best, the most diligent use of it. Let us never presume to blame the ways of the Lord. They are always holy and right, though we are unable to discern the particular reasons of them in every single event.

We know indeed, and this is the last remark we shall make on this head, we know that God is no austere master, requiring to reap where he has not sown, and to gather where he has not strewed. Indeed, were we to assert that God dooms to eternal torment all those who know not the gospel; then should we assert what is evidently in direct opposition to his justice and clemency. But we find nothing in the sacred books that can countenance such a horrible idea. They testify throughout, that God will reward every man according to his works; that he will judge every one according to the degree of light and knowledge he had, according to the means he possessed, according to the circumstances wherein he was placed; that he will require much from them to whom he has committed much, but will demand only little from them to whom he has entrusted little. They teach us that God is no respecter of persons, but that in every nation he that feareth him and worketh righteousness is accepted of him. We may therefore rest assured, that God, on that day, will judge the earth by the rules of the
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most perfect justice and equity, and that no man will have the least reason to complain of the unequal distribution of his favour and his benefits. Only upon those, attend to this, who call themselves christians, only upon those will hereafter the decretory rigours of a condemning sentence be passed, who obstinately shut their eyes against the light that shines upon them, who will not follow it, who hate it, and prefer darkness, because their deeds are evil.

The diversity of sects and parties into which christians have been split, forms a third prejudice against christianity. We acknowledge that these divisions tend to the disgrace of christians, inasmuch as they are repugnant to the spirit of the gospel, and are attended with very pernicious effects. But we cannot perceive, how this circumstance weakens the divine authority of the christian doctrine, or how it should be a sufficient argument for rejecting it.

For in the first place, if the diversity of opinions formed of a subject, were a sufficient argument for rejecting the truth, or not taking any concern about it; then we need not believe anything at all, and should surrender ourselves to complete scepticism. Have not the simple and ascertained doctrines of reason been in all ages disputed, by men who affect singularity and find pleasure in contradiction; have they not been at one time represented and considered
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in this manner, and then in that, without suffering any diminution on that account of their authority and certainty in the minds of impartial judges? Must we not, for example, be foolish and besotted to the last degree, to deny the being of a God, because mankind have widely differed among one another in the conceptions they have formed of that glorious being, because some have grounded their belief of the deity on one sort of demonstration, and others on another? Would it not be silly and preposterous to deny the difference between what is bad and good, what is right and wrong, because one man deduces this distinction from the will of God, another from the essential settlement and natural constitution of things, and a third from the various consequences our actions produce, and states it accordingly? And what reasonable man has ever wholly despised and rejected philosophy, because the teachers of it were separated into so many sects, and so frequently contradicted each other? Shall I not search after truth, shall I relinquish all hope of discovering it, because numbers falsely pretend to be in possession of it? No; but I must use the greater circumspection, the more diligence, the more impartiality, in the investigation of truth, and not surrender my judgment to human authorities, but to sound argument or substantial evidence. This is the only conclusion I can rationally

tionally draw from the diversity of opinions that subsists among philosophers. And ought I not to draw the very same conclusion respecting the various sects that obtain among christians ?

Nay I can with the utmost safety do this, as these sects are secondly not by far so discordant with each other, as the sects of the philosophers. All christians, whatever distinctive appellation they bear, in the main agree with each other. They all receive the sacred writings as a divine revelation, and prove their veracity, their authenticity, their heavenly origin, by the very same arguments. They all revere a divine providence, preserving and disposing all, continually watchful over mankind, punishing and rewarding them. They all recognize Jesus Christ as the promised messiah, as a divine teacher, as a celestial messenger, as the greatest benefactor to mankind, as our lord and king. They all believe that he came into the world at a stated time, that he did many wonderful works, that he led a life of consummate virtue, that he taught a holy and excellent doctrine, that he suffered innocently and voluntarily, that he died and on the third day rose again from the dead, that after his resurrection he was exalted to supreme glory and might, and sent his spirit, by the operation of which the apostles were enabled powerfully to combat superstition, idolatry and vice, and to disseminate truth and virtue in the world.

world. They all acknowledge themselves to be bound and obliged to follow the example of their lord and master, and to live soberly, righteously and godly. In fine, they all believe, that Christ will come again hereafter to judge the world, that he will reward every one according to his works, that the obstinate sinner has the heaviest punishment to dread, and the pious to expect an exceeding and eternal weight of glory. But if we cannot deny, pious hearers, that these are the essential dogmas of religion and christianity; and if it be certain, that they are adopted and maintained of all who bear the name of christians: then the diversity in their other opinions is so far from justifying us either in doubt or unbelief, that it rather gives a new degree of credibility to those dogmas; since it is plain from thence that they must be founded on the strongest and most convincing evidence, as it would not else be possible for so many persons of such opposite sentiments and tempers to be perfectly agreed on such a number of important particulars.

Therefore thirdly, the sects and controversies which have arisen among christians, are so far from weakening the credibility of christianity, that they much rather serve to confirm it; and though they have been the occasion of many flagrant and pernicious disorders in the moral conduct of mankind, yet in other respects they have

have been highly advantageous to truth. The earlier the christians divided into various parties, the more numerous those parties were, the more diligently they watched each other, the more severely they reciprocally criticised each other, in point of doctrine and behaviour; the less liable were the sacred books containing the christian revelation and the history whereon it rests, to be falsified; and the more certain may we be that the writings of the evangelists and apostles are come down to us without undergoing any material alterations. Probably we now should have had a very obscure, indistinct and incomplete knowledge of several truths of philosophy as well as of christianity, had not the controversies that arose about them given birth to a stricter investigation and a more exact discussion of them. Nay, but for this, would indeed the truth of the christian religion in general, and the reasonableness of its principal dogmas in particular, have been so often and so rigorously proved, and placed in so clear a light, as has actually been the case?

Lastly I remark, that it is not christianity itself, but the want of the christian spirit, that has been the cause of the divisions that prevail in the christian world. These divisions would for the most part cease, they would soon give place to a general pacification, to unanimity and brotherly love, if men took more pains to practise

tise real christianity, if they were more diligent to observe its precepts, if they hearkened more to the voice of Jesus and his apostles, than to the voice of their passions. But should we not act unjustly in charging on christianity the faults that proceed from human corruption, and are in such visible contradiction to it?

This leads us to the examination of the fourth prejudice against christianity. It relates to the bloody wars and the cruel persecutions, to which the profession and propagation of it have furnished a handle. These wars, these persecutions, are assuredly the lamentable monuments of human injustice and cruelty. They are undeniable evidences, that error and vice have frequently triumphed over truth and virtue; but they give us no right on their account to reproach the christian dispensation, or to deny its celestial origin.

For first, it is certain, that the christian doctrine inculcates nothing but benevolence, docility, gentleness and concord: and all dispositions and actions that are in opposition to those virtues, it expressly condemns. It is certain that Christ and his apostles not only most strictly enjoined those virtues upon all occasions, and made them the very basis of christianity, but that they exemplified them in a high degree of perfection, and never either spoke or did anything that was in the slightest degree inconsistent

tent with them. It is certain, finally, that the primitive christians distinguished themselves most conspicuously from all the rest of mankind by the display of those virtues, and thus acquired the reverence of their most inveterate enemies. Have christians in succeeding periods at times relaxed from these noble principles; have they frequently been more obedient to their passions than to the precepts of their lord and master: will anything more come of it, than that in such cases their behaviour was at variance with their knowledge, and that, in so far as they acted thus, they rendered themselves unworthy of the christian name? Are not the best establishments, the most salutary institutions, liable to abuse; and should we not act very unreasonably in rejecting them on that account, and pronouncing them bad and pernicious? Has not the erection of civil society, which is yet so adapted to the nature and destination of man, and procures him so many advantages and comforts, been attended with various kinds of fraud, of oppression and violence, which probably would never have existed if we had lived in an absolute independence on each other, and had preferred desarts and caves to cities and towns? Have not the arts and sciences, which so eminently evince the prerogatives and the nobility of mankind, which are in many respects so indispensable to us, are such abundant

sources of the most generous pleasures, and furnish us with such adequate means to the formation of our mind and our heart; have not they given rise to lusts and passions that are not found among rude and unpolished nations? Shall we therefore despise social life, condemn the arts and sciences, and hold the inventors and patrons of them for enemies to the human race? Or shall we not recognize and use the great and manifest advantages they procure us, because they are not always used as they might and should be? Would it not be to judge and to act just as perversely, were we to despise and not use the christian doctrine, which is not only designed, but is likewise perfectly adapted, to render human society a society of friends and brethren, and their dwellings the dwellings of harmony and peace, because all its professors have not those amiable and peaceable dispositions, which as such they may and should possess? Certainly, as unjust as it would be to accuse a father or a tutor, who applied all his endeavours to inspire his children or his scholars, both by precept and example, with the tenderest and most constant affection for each other, of being the instigator of the disputes and quarrels that should afterwards arise among them; so unjust would it be to impute the wars and violences that have arisen among christians to the excellent doctrine they profess, or
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to pronounce it on their account the less beneficial, and the less worthy of all acceptance.

The fact however is, that the generality of the wars and barbarities that have been attributed to religious zeal, arose from very different sources. Religion was in most of them no more than a pretext made subservient to the prosecution of the ambitious schemes of the lords of the earth, or to the gratification of their personal hatred and revenge, or to the assuaging of their insatiable cupidity for silver and gold; and these sordid passions would have been the same, and probably have had worse consequences, if they had failed of that pretext.

Here we must not omit to observe, that even the most unjust wars, that have been carried on among christians, have been far less cruel and destructive than those which were formerly waged between the heathen nations; and that the effects of animosity and rancour have not been by far so general and horrible among the former as the latter. Every one who is acquainted with antient and modern history, and compares them impartially together, cannot deny what is here advanced; but must acknowledge, that we are more indebted to the christian religion, even in this respect, than is commonly imagined.

We come now to the fifth and last prejudice against christianity. It is built on the small in-

fluence this religion has had on the tempers and conduct of its professors. It is seen, that many who name the name of Christ, are no better, not more virtuous, not more holy, than they who have only the light of reason for their guide; and thence is drawn an unfavourable conclusion against the excellency and divine origin of the christian religion. We must confess that this charge is not without foundation; it is a truth which daily experience but too much confirms; a truth which in all equity ought to shame and confound us, which should rouse us from the perilous sleep of sin, from our spiritual slumbers, and incite us to the zealous discharge of our duties. But where falls the disgrace arising from this truth? Where justly lies the reproach? On christianity, or on its unworthy professors? Certainly on these, and not on that. No, we need not be ashamed of the gospel of Christ; that is invariably a power of God unto salvation. But Christ must be ashamed of us, who declare ourselves his disciples, without following his example, and being so minded as he also was. Or, is not the christian religion the holiest religion that ever was delivered to mankind? Is there one vice, one sin, one failing, that it does not expressly condemn, that it does not severely prohibit? Is there one virtue, one good quality, which it does not recommend, which it does not forcibly urge and inculcate?

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Have not all its doctrines, all its commands, all its promises and threats, evidently our improvement and sanctification in view? Are they not all calculated in their very nature to make us the most just, the most affectionate, the most beneficent, the most generous of mankind? Is it possible for motives to goodness to be stronger than those which the gospel holds out to us? Should we then reject and despise a doctrine thus constituted, because many who pretend to embrace it, neglect altogether the practice of it, or oppose its salutary influence? Then should we likewise pronounce natural religion, and all that it teaches us concerning God, his attributes, his providence and a future retribution, to be errors, since few live conformably to it. Or can we with any show of reason require, that the gospel should act with an irresistible sway on its professors, and convert and save them without their concurrence, nay against their consent? Where has Christ, where have his apostles, given us the least room for so absurd an expectation? Should we be still free agents, should we still be capable of reward or punishment, if it did not depend on our own choice either to observe or to neglect the precepts of christianity? And is that then to blame, if many, if the majority prefer the latter course?

Yet

Yet this is not all. We have before us incontrovertible facts in behalf of christianity. Did it not produce the most astonishing and salutary reformation, the most excellent effects among mankind in the centuries first succeeding its promulgation? Could not a Paul make his appeal to the Corinthians, who had been immersed in the lowest depths of corruption: Be not deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified, in the name of the lord Jesus, and by the spirit of our God? Could not a Tertullian, in his apology for the christians, say with the utmost boldness to the roman governors; Your prisons are full of malefactors; but all these malefactors are heathens? Was not Pliny obliged to bear honourable testimony to the christians whom he was ordered to persecute, that he could discover no manner of harm in them, but that they had bound themselves by a solemn oath to avoid all iniquity and vice? Did not an apostate and inimical Julian find himself constrained to propose the christians as patterns of affection, compassion, liberality and temperance, to the heathen priests, for covering them with shame, and provoking them

them to emulation ? Did the gospel then formerly manifest itself so powerfully ; certainly therefore it is not to be imputed to it, but to the greater resistance and pertinacity of mankind, whenever the like does not happen in as eminent a degree and as remarkable a manner. In the mean time, we should be unjust and ungrateful to deny or not to confess the good effects the christian doctrine is still producing from day to day. Without it, there is no doubt but the corruption of manners would be far greater, genuine virtue and piety would be much more rare among us, than they actually are. This is sufficiently confirmed both by history and experience. Flagitious crimes and vices are indisputably not so numerous and common by far among christians, as among the heathen and muhammedan nations. The morals of the former have, upon the whole, greatly and remarkably the advantage over the morals of the latter. Justice, humanity, liberality, placability, fidelity and other social virtues, are much better understood and more commonly practised, among us than among them ; and the number of worthy and upright christians very far exceeds the number of worthy and upright infidels.

Now judge for yourselves, pious hearers, whether the prejudices against christianity, which we have been trying and combating, are of such a nature as to justify us in despising or
rejecting

rejecting it? You think, as I confidently hope, the contrary; you are convinced that these prejudices are quite unfounded: this then should strengthen your faith in Jesus and his gospel. It should guard you from all offence at the person of our redeemer and his doctrine, and inspire you with the profoundest veneration for them. But it should also move you to the firm resolution to shew forth their praise, not only with your lips, but in your lives; by giving up yourselves to the service of God, and by walking before him in holiness and righteousness all your days; by living consistently with the doctrines of Jesus, in obedience to all his commands. So will you evince by your conduct the excellency of christianity; you will put its adversaries to shame, and repel their objections by your life. Wherefore, beloved brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report, if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.

SERMON XXII.

*Some of the Prejudices against the Christian
Morality combated.*

GOD, what light and comfort hast thou diffused among thy creatures of the human race, by the gracious revelation of thyself through Jesus, of life and immortality through his gospel. What difficulties are now cleared up! What mysteries unravelled! How safely and confidently may we now pursue our way to the mark of our high calling! — Thanks and praise be ascribed to thee also, the son of the Highest, the beloved of the father, for all that thou hast done and taught and borne and suffered and sacrificed for us men and for our salvation! No trouble, no labour, no humiliation, no sacrifice, was too hard, too profound, too costly, for the love of truth, for the love of God, for the philanthropy that animated thee. Neither difficulties nor obstacles, neither opposition nor ingratitude, neither ignominy nor contempt, neither pain nor death, were able to deter thee from accomplishing the great work which the father gave

gave thee to perform. To do his will, by teaching, improving, and relieving mankind thy brethren, by rescuing them from error, from vice, from misery, by enlightening them, by preparing the way before them, by leading them to God, and by sowing good seed, the seed of truth, of virtue, of happiness, for all future ages: this was thy choicest, thy peculiar business on earth. To this end thou didst live and teach in poverty and abasement, amidst perpetual contradiction and persecutions. To this end, thou diedst on the cross, terminating by an innocent and holy death, a spotless and holy life, and thereby confirming thy mission from the father. Even upon the cross thou didst proclaim immortality and everlasting life, and thus deprive death of its terrors. And thou thyself didst triumph over death and the grave. Thee the father raised from the dead, in reward of thy fidelity, for the confirmation of our hope and confidence, elevated thee to his right-hand in heaven, and established thee the head of the church, the lord over all. — Yes, to thee we bow the knee as our lord and king. Thee we revere as the ambassador and representative of God among mankind. Thee we love, in thee we rejoice, as our great benefactor and saviour. Yes, it is our boast that we are thy confessors, thy disciples, thy followers, thy subjects, that we belong to thee, and stand in such intimate, such

such blessed relations to thee. Unto thee will we look, unto thee will we conform, confidently and joyfully walking the way which thou hast gone before us, and by which thou didst attain the prize. Where thou art, there shall also we thy servants be; there wilt thou also prepare a place for us. We shall behold thee and thy glory, and be partakers in it! Thy word is truth, thy promises sure and infallible: the father himself has pronounced them to be his declarations, his promises. In them is our trust; in them we rejoice. Happy, eternally happy for us, that we are christians! In thy name and in thy words we present our petitions at the throne of grace. Our father, &c.

MATTHEW xi. 6.

Blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in me.

THE mind of man depraved by sin, is inexhaustible as it were in objections and doubts, in subterfuges and cavils, when the bad affections of the heart are to be vindicated, or any plea in their behalf is to be defended. The slightest probability, a bare possibility, will then be admitted as a sufficient substitute for demonstration, and be made to controvert the most undeniable principles, the soundest arguments. Of this, the behaviour of the scorers and enemies of religion furnish us with a deplorable instance.

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If they cannot overturn the various and solid arguments on which the truth and divinity of religion rests; they seek at least to weaken the reverence that is due to it, by various objections, of greater or less apparent validity, that they may harden themselves in their unbelief. If they have neither inclination nor capacity for examining the christian doctrine in all its parts with due impartiality and attention, and for passing a discriminating judgment upon it; they content themselves with adopting certain general prejudices against it, which relate not so much to its essential quality and its intrinsic worth, as to some of its adscititious circumstances and casual effects.

We lately pious hearers, brought to the test and combated, several prejudices of this nature. We shewed you, that neither the pretended nor the real difficulties in the dogmas of christianity, nor the narrow boundaries to which it is confined on the globe of the earth, nor the diversity of sects into which christians have divided, nor the wars and persecutions to which the christian religion has given occasion or pretext, nor the little influence it has on the dispositions and the behaviour of its professors, are sufficient to excuse us in contemning or rejecting it; and that all these allegations are of such a nature as to make no unfavourable impression of it in the mind of a sincere and impartial lover of truth.

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At present by the divine assistance and blessing we will examine three ~~other~~ prejudices against christianity; which are the more pernicious, as they relate to the practical part of it, or the evangelical morality. It is objected, that at bottom it is nothing else than the morality of reason, and ~~has~~ little or no advantage over it; that it is absolutely too rigid and austere, and extremely difficult, nay impossible to be reduced to practice; that it is calculated to depress the human mind, and to render us dispirited and heartless. A nearer view of these objections will convince you, as I confidently hope, of their absolute want of foundation, and set the excellency of the doctrine of Jesus and his apostles in a conspicuous light.

First, I say, it is objected, that it is nothing more than the morality of reason, and has little or no advantage over it: whence it is inferred, that mankind had no need of this peculiar revelation, for learning their duties and the reasons on which they are founded. An objection, pious hearers, which though advanced with great effrontery, by the teachers of infidelity, and dressed out with all possible ingenuity, yet proceeds only from ignorance, or from a blameable partiality, as the following remarks will clearly evince.

In the first place we readily grant, that all the precepts of the gospel are reasonable in the
highest

highest degree ; that they are all in perfect agreement with our nature and the relations we bear both to God and man, to the present and the future world. We allow further, that a christian philosopher is able to shew and to place beyond all manner of doubt, the justice, the equity, the beauty of these precepts, by conclusions from argumentation alone. But, does it therefore follow, that a heathen philosopher also, or that any rational and reflecting person, to whom the knowledge and practice of his duties is as important as to the philosopher, is able to do this? Does it follow, that we should ever have been able to proceed so far in this respect, if the light of the gospel had not shone upon us, and conducted us on the way of truth? Is there not a great difference between the reason which is reinforced and improved by a divine revelation, and the reason that is left to itself, and is destitute of these excellent resources? We are early in life instructed in the doctrine of christianity. We are thus secured from many gross and pernicious errors which were formerly prevalent among the heathens, and to the refutation and dereliction whereof it required no small degree of reflection and vigour of mind. Even at a period while we are not in a capacity to launch out into copious researches and investigations, for distinguishing the true from the false, for acquiring just con-
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ceptions of the nature of God and man, of our origin and our destination ; we are taught to know our relative position to God, our creator and lord, our father and benefactor ; we are led to the belief of a wise and righteous providence, which extends over all, which disposes all, and which hereafter will require an account of the behaviour of mankind. How then can it otherwise be, than that, enriched with these ideas and attainments, we should think much more justly, and advance much farther in morals, than the heathen sages, who were ignorant in all these respects, or uncertain and doubtful, or were even infected with 'the grossest errors ? But should we not be exceedingly partial, should we not be guilty of the basest ingratitude, in ascribing these advantages to our own sagacity, in not attributing them to the light of divine revelation ? Should we not even be highly inconsistent in despising the gospel, or in holding it for a less precious boon of divine compassion, because our understanding, after it has been made known to us, must necessarily confess that its precepts are equitable and salutary and proper ?

This is not all. History incontestably informs us, that the morality of the heathen philosophers was very imperfect in many respects, as we more largely evinced on a former occasion. Its precepts were extremely defective. They did

did not condemn all vices and faults without exception ; they did not enjoin all the virtues without distinction as indispensably necessary ; and the filial fear of God, love to him, confidence in him, gratitude for his benefits, acquiescence in all his dispensations, a zealous endeavour at rendering ourselves agreeable to him, and by integrity and holiness to be partakers of a divine nature, a universal charity unconfined to any particular nation, true humility, forgiveness of injuries, heavenly-mindedness, purity of heart and faith, are duties which were almost totally unknown to them, of which we seldom or never hear them speak. Again, their precepts were not calculated for the moral state of mankind at present. Either they were too complying, and contented themselves with a conduct free from heinous crimes, from manifest and flagrant enormities, and not at variance with the laws of the land ; or they were too rigorous and austere, and required a degree of perfection, or rather of indifference towards the accommodations of life, and such a pitch of acting as the present strengths of nature must not pretend to. Either they granted man the unhappy permission to seek his sovereign good in the pleasures of sense, and in a compliance with his lusts ; or they absolutely required him to eradicate all his passions, and attain to an insensibility, a perfect apathy, both towards himself and others.

others. Their best maxims were moreover so framed, that they could scarcely make any impression on the majority of mankind, and had very little efficacy in persuading them to virtue. As their knowledge of God, of his attributes, of his providence, of the creation of the universe, of our entire dependence on the supreme being, and of our relations to him, was extremely erroneous and obscure; so neither could they deduce their morality from those truths, which yet are the only solid foundation on which morality can be built. The pagan religion, which was by no means moral, but made up entirely of rites and sacrifices, was more prejudicial than useful to morality, with which it had nothing at all to do. Ethics or moral philosophy was rather considered as a science, appertaining solely to the schools of the philosophers. The moralists therefore could not give their precepts the sanction of laws; they could not deliver them as the holy and inviolable commands of the great creator and sole proprietor of heaven and earth; they could represent them no otherwise than as naturally reasonable and befitting. But who knows not how ill-adapted such representations are to act upon the generality of mankind, and how few of them are observant and acute, or even candid enough, to perceive the justice and force of them, with such perspicuity and conviction, as to be moved by

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their means to make any alteration in their temper and conduct ? In short the morality of the heathen philosophers must have suffered much from their general ignorance of the important doctrines of the immortality of the soul and of the life to come ; from their being forced to put up with bare surmises about it, and their inability of attaining to entire and plenary conviction ! What can enable a man to gain a victory over the most flattering temptations to sin ; what can induce him to remain firm to his obligations in the greatest and most imminent dangers ; what can make him resolute in sacrificing all that he else most esteems and loves, even his honour and his reputation with posterity not excepted, to integrity and virtue, unless his courage be fired by the prospect of a better world, and he in a manner raised above himself, and above all that is temporal and visible ? But are not all these great, are they not essential defects in the morality of unassisted reason ? And shall the morality of the gospel be allowed no advantages over it ? How happily, how completely, does it supply all these defects ! Consistency, fitness, precision, perspicuity, simplicity, authority, energy, life, are properties that no man can detract from it, who considers it with an inquisitive, a sincere and virtuous mind. It admonishes us against every vice ; it excites us to every virtue ; it comprises all our duties ; it propounds them

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in such a manner, that everybody may easily comprehend and apply them; it enforces them by the most powerful motives; it gives them the sanction of divine commands. It is no less adapted to improve our heart than to regulate our outward deportment. It interdicts us no innocent pleasures; but it forbids us the immoderate enjoyment of them, and the sensuality that arises from it. It tends not to make us insensible towards the evils and misfortunes of life; but it gives us the most powerful inducements to bear them with patience, and thence to become wiser and better. It treats us moreover as sinners, who are in need of pardon, forbearance and lenity, and is indulgent towards our unavoidable infirmities. It assures us that God will graciously regard our sincere and persevering endeavours to please him, and to perfect our holiness, though we should not attain to perfection. It teaches us to consider the present life as a state of discipline, of exercise and trial, and directs our principal attention to the future. It acquaints us satisfactorily with what, when this life is ended, we have to hope or to fear; of the account we are hereafter to give of our conduct, and of the eternal retribution we have to expect; and thus adds a divine efficacy to all its injunctions, sufficient to conquer our corruption, and to make us new creatures. But, if the morality of the gospel has so many signal

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advantages, how much does the revelation of it conduce to the glorification of the wisdom and goodness of God ; and how ungrateful must we be if we censure the means he has thought fit to employ in this respect, or imagine them unnecessary and superfluous !

The second prejudice against the evangelical morality is, that it is absolutely too austere, and not reducible to practice. It spares indeed no vice, no sordid affection, no sinister design. It is not to be satisfied with the semblance of virtue and the mask of devotion. It requires improvement of heart, regularity of desire ; it inspires us with a transcendent and ever active love for whatever is true and just and becoming, for whatever is estimable and amiable ; and thus elevates us to the honour and the happiness of still gaining a nearer resemblance to God, and to his son our saviour, of continually becoming more and more capable of felicity in the future world. Hither tend all the precepts of the christian morality. It accordingly requires of us that we should deny all ungodliness and worldly lusts, and live soberly, righteously and godly in this present world. In this view, it enjoins us to crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts, to follow after sanctification and virtue with indefatigable exertion, and to perfect our holiness in the fear of the Lord. In this design it requires us to deny ourselves, and to be fol-
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lowers of Jesus ; to be ready to forego our all, whatever is most dear and delightful to us on earth, nay our life itself, for the sake of truth and religion ; to look, not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen ; to seek those things which are above. These and the like requisites certainly seem austere. The corrupted heart revolts against them, and often takes up the language of the incredulous jews : This is a hard saying ; who can hear it ? To which we reply :

First : this objection is applicable in general to the morality of reason, no less than to that of christianity ; and consequently cannot in the smallest degree derogate from the importance and excellency of the latter. For the former, as well as the latter, prescribes us many duties which we cannot fulfill without much pains and labour, without struggles and conflicts, seeing they directly oppose and bid defiance to the violence of our sensual appetites, our vicious habits, and the licentious maxims on which the conduct of the multitude is framed, and prevent us at times from pursuing and advancing what we term our fortune in the world. They both equally require of us to maintain the controul of ourselves, to set bounds to our desires and to moderate our passions ; on many occasions to sacrifice our convenience and our satisfactions, however harmless they otherwise may be, to
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our duty, and our private interest to the public good ; to look not solely at the present, but also at the future ; to think and to act, not entirely as animal, but as rational and immortal beings ; continually to urge forward, to a more eminent degree of perfection ; to be firm and immoveable in the love and practice of probity and virtue, and not to suffer ourselves to be deterred or allured from our course either by threats or promises. On these general principles of reason, rest all, even the hardest precepts of the gospel ; and we cannot reject these, without at the same time renouncing those.

In the second place, the purity and holiness of the christian morality is so far from lessening its authority, that it confirms it the more and renders it altogether venerable. Could we recognize a scheme of doctrine that flattered the sensual appetites of mankind, or contented itself with an inferior degree of piety and virtue, training us up to mere honest and harmless citizens of this world and not to form us into citizens of heaven, as a divine revelation ? Should we not justly pronounce it to be all a mere human fabrication, unworthy of the supremely perfect being and of the extraordinary events that were brought about for its promulgation and enforcement ? How can we then, without the grossest inconsistency, make that an objection to the evangelical morality, which so plainly
attests

attests both its verity and the divinity of its origin? Should we not on the contrary for that very reason, account it excellent, acceptable and divine, because it connives at no fault, no sin, no vice; because all its precepts are so pure, so holy; because they are all so adapted to improve and to elevate our whole nature, to inspire us with the most just, the most beneficent, the noblest dispositions, and to render us progressively more perfect?

Thirdly, we need only consider the scope and tendency of the evangelical morality; we need only recollect the destination of man; for immediately perceiving that its precepts are not too harsh and austere. We shall find, that they contain nothing arbitrary in them, but are strictly assorted to our present and future state. Only reflect, pious hearers, how strong our attachment to sensuality, how great our moral depravity, how various and captivating the temptations to evil, and how easily we are decoyed into the snare, unless we continually watch over ourselves, unless we suppress the first motions of irregular desire, if we allow ourselves in the least inattention, or are slothful in the practice of virtue and goodness; at the same time consider, that we are only strangers and pilgrims on the earth; that we have no abiding city here, but must seek it in futurity; that we find ourselves at present in a state of discipline
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and exercise ; that our everlasting lot depends on the quality of our present deportment ; that we are invited to a happiness which is to consist in the purest pleasures, in the noblest occupations ; and that we shall therefore be absolutely incapable of that felicity, unless we now acquire a predominant disposition to universal goodness, and a certain aptitude in the practice of it ; unless we habituate ourselves at present to rise in thought and desire above visible objects, and employ ourselves in spiritual and heavenly things : ponder all this, I say, and you will plainly perceive, that the precepts of the gospel are exactly proportioned to our circumstances and exigencies ; nay, you will be obliged to own, that they would be insufficient to subdue our corruption, and to prepare such creatures as we are for that state of perfection and happiness, if they were less pure, less holy ; if they omitted to inculcate upon us vigilance and industry in our conduct, to wage perpetual war with our lusts, the practice of self-denial and contempt for the world, heavenly-mindedness and an unremitted endeavour to please God, and to have communion with him, the most pure and holy being, as essential and necessary obligations of christianity.

As to what in the fourth place particularly relates to persecutions for the sake of truth and religion we readily admit, that great fortitude of mind,

mind, and a high degree of virtue are requisite for sacrificing our honour, our possessions, nay life itself, in the cause of God and religion, to take up the cross of Christ with resolution and joy, and to follow him even in death. But is it not right, is it not reasonable so to do? To truth and integrity can we ever bring too costly offerings? Can we ever do too much for Christ, our saviour and lord? Is it to be called a loss, if we sacrifice anything from love and obedience to God, who holds in his hands whatever felicity we can hope to enjoy? What are all the sufferings of this present time, compared to the eternal and exceeding weight of glory prepared for the faithful followers of our redeemer, for those who fight and conquer in his cause? Or is it impossible to give such proofs of attachment? Have not many of the first christians demonstrated the contrary by their example? Have they not far preferred the unfading crown of life, to the distinctions, the possessions and pleasures of the world? Did they not remain constant in the midst of afflictions and persecutions. Besides, how rarely does the mercy of God, who knows our infirmity, allow us to fall into such dangerous trials! And how powerful is the assistance, how extraordinary the consolation, with which he supports his sincere and faithful worshipers, when he requires of them such proofs of integrity and faith!

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To conclude, pious hearers, we cannot discover in general either an internal or an external impossibility of living up to the precepts of the gospel, since those precepts are by no means contradictory, but all breathe the most beautiful harmony and tend to the selfsame object ; since they are all founded on the nature of the case itself, and on the relative situations in which we are placed both to God and man ; as they are all designed and adapted to promote and to confirm our present and future perfection and happiness. They may be considered as the natural and necessary results of the love of God and of our neighbour ; and no man can observe these fundamental laws of christianity, without discharging at once the other duties it enjoins. As little are we able to discover an external impossibility of reducing the evangelical morality to practice. For, on one side, the motives by which it urges us to obedience are so various, so affecting, so powerful, that they necessarily must make the deepest impression upon us, and help us to overcome all temptations, if we frequently ponder them with steadfast attention, and do not obstinately resist their salutary influence. Certainly, if the idea of an omniscient, almighty, holy and righteous being, who is the constant and incorruptible witness of all our thoughts and actions, and on whom our life and all our happiness depends ; if the love of God,

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who for our sakes spared not his only begotten son ; if the contemplation of the cross of the dying Jesus ; if the expectation of a judgment to come ; if the hope of an eternal and ineffable felicity ; if all this be not capable of rendering the accomplishment of our duties practicable and easy, and of enabling us to contend with firmness and intrepidity in the most trying circumstances : then is nothing able to effect it, and our hearts must be utterly insensible and incorrigibly hardened in vice. On the other side God himself will enable us by his word both to will and to do according to his good pleasure. He will be mighty in our weakness ; he will never suffer us to be tempted above that we are able to bear ; he will come to our relief by the methods of his wise providence, and facilitate the work of our sanctification to us ; he will give us his spirit, and grant us the peculiar assistance of his grace, as often as we have need of it, after a faithful and diligent use of the ordinary means of salvation. Furnished with these means and supported by this help, every sincere christian may boast with the apostle : I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height [prosperity], nor depth [adversity], nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ

Christ Jesus our lord. But who sees not, that this is in manifest contradiction to the assumed impossibility of living up to the precepts of the gospel? And this reproach is only chargeable on those who make it, and not on christianity; since they thereby betray a shameful inaptitude to goodness, and a criminal love of sin. At least he who has a predominant taste for what is morally beautiful and good and becoming, and stretches on to perfection, according to his vocation, will certainly never complain, that the rules put into his hands are too strict and too rigid.

The third prejudice against christianity in general, and the evangelical morality in particular, is, that it depresses the spirit of man; that it renders him pusillanimous, timid and dejected: and in proof of it, they principally appeal to those commands of meekness, humility, placability, and love towards enemies, which Christ and his apostles have given to us. To this we reply: first, that this objection is in direct opposition to the whole tenour of the christian religion in general, and that in its very nature it is framed and adapted to produce the quite contrary effects. For what is it that commonly depresses the spirit of man? What is it that mostly enervates his faculties both of body and mind? What deprives him of inclination and courage to great and generous actions? What
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makes him fainthearted and timid ? It is either the consciousness of his transgressions, the perturbation and stings of his conscience, the dread of condign punishment ; or it is the irregular and immoderate love of sensual gratifications and the dreadful disasters of intemperance and unsubdued desires ; or it is the want of consolation and hope in dangers ; or it is a natural disposition to melancholy and dejection. But does not christianity, if we believe its doctrines and follow its precepts, obviate all these impediments to energy of mind, to real fortitude, and generous heroism ? Does it not furnish us with the best weapons for combating and conquering them ? It even shews us how we may free ourselves from the burden of our sins, how we may obtain the divine forgiveness, and be reconciled with God. It calms the conscience of the believing christian ; it assuages his heart, instilling into it peace and joy in the holy spirit ; and though the wicked flee when no man pursueth, yet the righteous, whose heart condemns him not, is as bold as a lion. Again the christian religion interdicts us all excess in sensual pleasure. It prescribes us sobriety, moderation and abstinence. It requires that we take more care of the soul than of the body ; that we refine and exalt our taste ; that we walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit ; and, like the agonistics in the grecian games, that we voluntarily abstain

abstain from whatever may impede us in obtaining the victory over ourselves and over the world ; and thus renders us expert in the exercise of the most arduous, the most exalted virtues. The christian religion informs us of a wise and gracious providence, which by its superintending and disposing agency governs all things, which provides for every creature, which in all its dispensations has the noblest views, and which disposes all events so that they must be subservient to the interest of them that love God ; and thus renders all adversities and tribulations tolerable and easy to them. It teaches us lastly to consider this life in its conjunction with the future ; it certifies us of the immortality of our spirit, and gives us the unfailing hope of a felicity which far exceeds in magnitude and duration all that here on earth we know of desirable and precious ; and thus puts us in a condition to despise every evil we can meet with in the world, nay death itself, and to triumph over the horrors of the grave. And shall a man, who is cordially devoted to the christian religion, who believes its doctrines from conviction, and is obedient to its precepts, shall he be spiritless, dastardly and dejected ? Or, can anything thoroughly soothe us ; can anything render us undaunted, resolute and cheerful, if christianity is unable to effect it ?

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The same may be particularly affirmed of the virtues of humility, meekness and placability, which the gospel recommends. These virtues are so far from degrading mankind, or abating their courage, that they essentially pertain to true greatness of mind, and fit us for the noblest and most beneficent undertakings. He that ruleth his spirit, says the wise king, is mightier than he that taketh a city. And in fact, which is nobler, to requite evil with evil, or evil with good ; to revenge oneself on an enemy by all possible means, or to subdue him by unmerited benefits, and by gentleness strive to bring him to a sense of the wrongs he has committed ? Which is most adapted to beget and establish peace, contentment, cheerfulness, satisfaction, and comfort within us ; a heart that is addicted to pride, to envy, to hatred, to anger, that is thrown into violent commotion at every affront, and pregnant with schemes and desires of revenge ; or a heart that is possessed by a sincere affection towards all men, that is free from disorderly and furious passions, that has a prevalent propensity to spare, to forgive, to do good ? Which will be more willing and apt to perform great and disinterested actions, and to consult the public interest without regard to his private emolument ; he that is intoxicated with pride, who exalts himself above his fellow-creatures, and never hesitates to sacrifice the most sacred laws

laws of order and virtue to his imaginary honour, and his self-importance ; or he who, because he has a modest opinion of himself and loves all men as his brethren, is constantly ready to oblige them, and requires no other reward for his most considerable services, than the approbation of God and his conscience ? Which in short will behave with greater intrepidity in misfortune ; he who seeks his sovereign good in the flattering acclamations of mankind, and in the reverence they pay to him, to his rank, to his riches ; or he who makes the consciousness of his innocence and integrity, and the good pleasure of the supreme being the principal source of his happiness ? Certainly we should judge very partially, we should betray a depravity of sentiment, were we not to allow to the christian, who thinks and lives by the precepts of the gospel, the preference over the worldly-minded man ; or, if we could entertain a doubt that the former is far more capable than the latter of elevating himself to real greatness of mind, of acquiring a permanent tranquillity of spirit, and of displaying the most immovable fortitude in every danger.

This will suffice, pious hearers, for convincing you of the futility of the prejudices against christianity which we have been combating to-day. May it at the same time fill you with the profoundest veneration for it, and confirm you
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in the belief of its divine origin ! But may it also rouse you to obey its commands, and excite you to fresh ardour in the observance of them ! What will it profit us, to be convinced of the fallacy of these prejudices, if we still act so as if they were solid and just ? What will it avail us, to confess the justice, the equity, the excellency of the christian morality, unless we reduce it to practice ? Will it not increase our guilt, and render the punishment of our disobedience the more severe ? Shall we not thus confirm the infidel in his opposition to the christian religion, and supply him with fresh arms for renewing his attacks ? No, pious hearers, we will follow the perceptions and the conviction of our minds, as it is fitting for rational creatures to do. We will combat every prejudice, not only with our lips, but also by our whole deportment. We will refute them by actions, and shew by our own example, that it is not impossible to live up to the rules of the gospel ; and that such a life is not only honourable and beautiful in itself, but likewise promotes the perfection and happiness of mankind. * Should we find obstacles and difficulties in the prosecution of these pious designs ; let us lift our eyes to the glorious rewards we have to expect in that other world, and depend on the grace of the Most High, who is mightiest in the feeble. The crown of life, the heritage of heaven, the

eternal repose and delights of the blessed, are well worth our earnest endeavours to obtain, our perseverance to the end, as good soldiers of Christ. The further we advance in virtue and piety ; the easier and pleasanter shall we find it. Our powers will be constantly increasing by the practice of goodness ; we shall proceed from conquest to conquest ; we shall always be drawing nearer to the glorious mark at which we are running, and at length lay hold on the pearl of great price, to the possession whereof God through Christ has called us.

SERMON XXIII.

How every one is able and ought to labour at promoting the public Prosperity.

GOD, who declarest thy almighty power most chiefly in doing good, and in all the methods in which thou dealest with thy creatures, intendest only their happiness; it is thy will that, as thy children, we should imitate thee, that we should take delight in beneficence, that according to our abilities, we should promote the general happiness of our brethren; and thy wise bounty supplies us all, each according to his station and calling, with sufficient means and opportunities for accomplishing this, thy gracious purpose. Thou hast linked us together in various ways, both by nature and by religion; and allotted to each of us a situation wherein he may be useful to himself and others. Oh then also grant, that we may be strictly united in the bands of mutual and cordial affection; that each of us may worthily fill the station in which he is placed; that we all may

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make the best, the most generally beneficial use of our capacities, of our abilities, of our time, of our property. Root out all seeds of selfishness, of injustice and of cruelty from our hearts, and replenish them with generous, with beneficent and public-spirited sentiments. Let us as christians have always before our eyes the example of our redeemer, who purely for our sakes did and endured so much ; and grant that we may evermore walk in his footsteps. Bless to the furtherance of these designs the meditations that are to occupy us in the present hour, and hearken to our prayer for the merits of Christ, our mediator and saviour ; who, knowing our wants and our ignorance in asking, gave us that comprehensive form in which we thus further address thee, saying : Our father, &c.

PHILIPP. ii. 4.

Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.

WE have often observed to you, pious hearers, that, both as men and as christians, we are bound to promote, according to our means, the general benefit of the human and christian society to which we belong ; and if once we consider the variety and strength of the ties that attach us together in these two respects, it will not be difficult for us to perceive that we have the strongest motives for heartily adopting this public-

public-minded conduct. Probably however to some it may seem no easy matter to obtain clear and just conceptions of the methods whereby this duty is to be performed. Probably some may be actually performing it in the most laudable manner, and yet are all the while complaining that their circumstances put it out of their power to do so; and thereby fail of perceiving the real value of their best exertions, and lose that sentiment of it which would at once encourage them to a cheerful perseverance, and reward them for it. Probably numbers may say to themselves: Yes, if I were a ruler or a statesman; if I were a public teacher; if I filled such a station among my brethren, as should give me the right and the authority to labour at the public wellfare, to issue salutary ordinances for the good of my countrymen, or to compel them to the strict observance of those already provided, to administer law and justice, to oversee the public institutions for relieving the poor, the widow and the orphan, and to distribute rewards and punishments according to desert; if I had the capacity or the opportunities for serving the government and the realm by my advice, for surveying and providing for the emergencies of the nation at large, or by my lessons to form the minds and the hearts of the rising generation, and had some influence in correcting the prevailing opinions and manners: then I might,
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then I would with the greatest pleasure labour at the general benefit, and perhaps for its sake entirely forget myself and my own private emolument. But how can I do this in my humble station, my consequence being so little that I have no power and authority at all over others, and pass my days in obscurity? I carry on a low contemptible trade, an ordinary occupation; I am employed in a certain kind of business, which I am forced to consider rather as a means of livelihood for myself and my family, than as a branch of the public weal; or I am in the service of others, and must very often devote myself to matters that are scarcely worth the attention of a rational creature. How limited therefore are my means of doing good! How can I propose to myself so grand an aim as that of the general benefit? And how could I be able to accomplish it in my condition? Such reflections have probably presented themselves to many of you, my friends, when we would excite you to a generous and public-spirited conduct, when we have addressed you with the apostle in our text: Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others; and there can be no doubt but these reflections have in many rendered such exhortations fruitless, by depriving them of all encouragement to the observance of this precept. I have therefore resolved now to meet these difficulties

culties and objections, by endeavouring to give you juster and plainer ideas on the subject. To this end I shall do two things.

First, I shall shew you in a few remarks, how every man without distinction of station and calling may and ought to labour at the general welfare. Afterwards I will draw from them some particular practical results or prudential rules of conduct.

The first remark is this: the general welfare is a very complex business. It comprehends the benefit of each individual member of the body politic taken together, and consists in the combination of all the particular exertions, which each individual in his station and calling employs to do that, which by its means he ought to do. No one can in his individual capacity maintain the reverence due to the laws, to order, to the peace, the security, the prosperity of the whole society, and bring it to a certain degree of perfection. But if each individual be submissive to the laws and polity, and inviolably observe and obey them, then the law and the polity is upheld in general reverence. If each individual conforms to the rules of order, order prevails in the whole society. If each individual lives peaceably and tractably with his friends, his acquaintance, his relations and neighbours, the public peace is secured. If each man faithfully fills the place allotted him,

him, and punctiliously performs the duties of it, an excellent harmony must necessarily pervade the whole. Human or political society in this respect resembles the human body. This is made up of numerous, great and small, important and less important parts. Each has its peculiar position, its own powers, its particular operations and functions. No one can alter its position, or apply its powers to contrary purposes, or change its operations for the operations of another, without injury to the whole. No one needs to provide properly for the whole, but each solely for his own office; and yet every one contributes certainly something, by means of the strict association in which they all stand together, to the maintenance, to the symmetry, to the beauty of the whole. The least and lowest of these several parts is in this respect just as necessary and important, as the greatest and chiefest, though the former by its nature and situation do not and cannot perform so much and such considerable service, as these. Just as it is with the human body, and all other natural or artificial machines, which are composed of various springs, wheels, weights, and the like, collocated together; so is it likewise with human society. It consists of very many, stronger and weaker, more or less considerable members, which have all their particular destination, their particular capacities, dispositions, adaptations

adaptations and functions, and the effects of the due and rational application of all these various capacities, dispositions, adaptations and employments, produce in their combination what we term the public welfare, interest or prosperity. Let each then only seek to correspond with his particular destination, and he may rest assured that he is at the same time promoting the benefit of the rest. Let the farmer cultivate the ground, and procure as great abundance from the earth, as the most unwearied industry can obtain ; let the citizen, the mechanic, the artist, prepare and work up these productions to the most profitable use ; let the merchant barter the surplus for riches of some other kind, which the country does not produce ; let the father, the mother, imbue their children with the first notions and sentiments of religion, with a regard for duty and virtue, and the clergyman unfold these notions and elevate these sentiments by his public and private instructions ; let the scholar refute the baneful prejudices of the vulgar, study to make useful discoveries, and render them public in the most comprehensible manner ; let the unlearned profit by the light which the scholar holds out to him, and put it to the experiment whether what he proposes be practicable and useful or not ; let the great and noble discharge the duties of their station with proper concern, and their subordinates facilitate
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to them these duties by the ready and faithful services they afford ; let the poor apply their faculties to work, and the rich dispense their superfluity in acts of beneficence ; let the judge be impartial and strict in the administration of justice and equity ; let the magistrate be the vigilant guardian of public security, order, tranquillity and liberty ; in a word, let the sovereign take care that the weightiest offices be supplied by the worthiest persons, let him patronize and encourage all beneficial institutions by his authority, let him, as much as possible, have an eye to all, and so cement the several parts of the whole together, as will most probably tend to its greatest and most permanent happiness. So will every one fulfill his vocation : and if so, if every one according to his station and calling is and does, what he may and ought to be and to do, then will every one contribute his proportion to the general interest, and the whole society will infallibly be prosperous and happy.

For setting this in a more perspicuous light, for shewing you still more plainly, how every one by the faithful performance of the duties of his calling, labours at promoting the general welfare, and how even such as have no particular vocation in the world, but are merely in the service of others, or otherwise connected with them, may do so likewise, I make a second remark, which is this : As we may promote the
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public prosperity, either in the aggregate or in certain particulars, so likewise may we do this either immediately or mediately. The former by such actions, as in themselves have a considerable influence on the welfare of the society at large ; the latter is effected by our giving occasion to these generally useful actions, assisting the persons who carry them on, affording them facilities, and relieving them from certain occupations and incumbrances that would have been a hindrance to them. The former can only be done by a few ; the latter may and should be done by all. When the sovereign, by his valour and that of his warriors, protects the realm, keeps off the foe, and thus prevents all the misery and devastations of war, he immediately promotes, and in a very high degree, the general good. But the soldiers and sailors who execute his commands ; the citizen and the countryman who enable the prince by their taxes, to set on foot and to support the army and navy ; the manufacturer, the workman who prepares the cloaths and weapons for them ; the preacher who inspires them with courage by the doctrines of religion ; the christian, who like Moses lifts up his hands to God in prayer for victory : do not all these promote the general good, as certainly and as effectually as the sovereign, who employs their united abilities and efforts to the successful execution of his beneficent plans ?

plans? — The statesman, the judge, the teacher of sciences, the teacher of religion, may also contribute much immediately to the prosperity of the whole body politic. They may promote tranquillity, safety, industry and application, truth and virtue, which are alike necessary and useful to the well-being of all states, of all conditions and of all mankind. But how many helps do they require, what various services do they stand in need of, if we would have them do this successfully and without interruption? Here are divers urgent wants, wants of nature, wants of station, wants arising from the habits of life, which they themselves cannot supply without robbing themselves and the common weal of a part of their precious time, without distracting the attention that is devoted to the most important concerns, and exhausting their faculties. On another side are various kinds of difficulties, of disagreeable occurrences, of little and great vexations, which have the same hostile effects upon them, and must relax their zeal for the public welfare. But how many opportunities do these very circumstances afford, how many means do they present to persons of inferior capacities or of subordinate stations, for promoting, if not immediately perhaps, yet mediately, the general benefit! You, who are placed in domestic or amicable connections with such important and deserving members of the state
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and the church, or who have them for your superiors ; let their example stimulate you to labour, like them, at the prosperity of your fellow-creatures, and to become truly useful to the community ; to this end you need not go out of your station and calling ; you need not employ yourselves in the very same affairs which they are obliged to transact ; you may share with them in the honour of having acted for the common welfare, on much easier terms and in a surer way. Only provide with honest diligence for their necessities, for which they themselves cannot provide without the manifest detriment of their charge. Only provide with scrupulous fidelity for all that has a tendency to support and confirm their health, their quiet and their content. Only, with circumspection and prudence, remove from them whatever is calculated to draw off their attention from more momentous objects, that may abate their vigour, that may damp the ardour of their mind, that may occupy it with needless anxiety and cares. Only manage so, if you be still more intimately connected with them by the ties of marriage, or of consanguinity and friendship, only so manage all things that they may enjoy unmolested, in the hours of relaxation, the pleasures of friendship, the pleasures of domestic life, the mind's most wholesome diet, its best restoratives. Thus will you act no less honourably nor with less public-

public-spirit than they on whom you bestow these offices ; thus will you actually have part in their great undertakings, in their beneficial concerns, forasmuch as they without your help, could either not bring them to effect at all, or not with so much success.

In like manner may we in many other cases, besides being contributors to the public benefit by the faithful discharge of the duties of our calling, mediate promote it in various ways, though we may not immediately be able to do so. Take for instance a natural philosopher, actuated by the pure and ardent love of truth, who is earnestly desirous to devote himself entirely to the investigation of it, who possesses uncommon capacities for seeking after it, and who probably might oblige the whole human race by a variety of useful inventions and discoveries. But his outward circumstances allow him not to follow unimpeded this generous impulse, and to devote all his time, all his faculties, to the gratification of it. Oft must he stop short midway in the track that would lead him to some important discovery, or even retreat, because the painful apprehension of his constantly increasing penury constrains him to attend with solicitude to such matters as have no connection with his main pursuit, but are rather repugnant to it. Would you then, you who, with far inferior capacities and powers of intellect,

lect, have perhaps an equal love for truth, and the same public-spirited inclination, would you act consistently with that inclination ; support this philosopher, by your countenance and your property ; procure him an unsollicitous, tranquil and comfortable life ; repay him by your esteem and friendship for his wearisome application ; remove from him as much as in you lies the obstructions that retard him in his progress : thus will you, when he has succeeded so as to light up a shining taper for his brethren, by disclosing to them some important experiments, have a considerable share in those discoveries, and in the beneficial consequences they shall produce in all succeeding ages. — Yonder is an ingenious, active man, who has found out new sources of useful industry, who, by his peculiar ingenuity, by his singular dexterity, is able to bring a certain manufacture, some particular article of commerce into request, and thus greatly to benefit the whole society, perhaps to the latest posterity. But he is deficient in means to undertake and prosecute this business with proper energy. Assist him with your means, you who are heartily desirous of being useful members of the community, the benefactors of your contemporaries ; place him in a condition to apply his dexterity and his industry : so will you partake with him, not indeed in the honour of the discovery, but in the honour of its prosecution ;

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and the society will owe you its thanks in some respect as much as to him ; because without your assistance he would never have been able to do it that service, which he has now actually brought to effect.

The third remark is this : We may promote the public prosperity, while we are providing for our own ; at times however we may and ought to do it by voluntarily neglecting some particular emolument, by solely providing for the support and the greater emolument of the rest of the community. The former holds good on most occasions ; the latter is but seldom and in particular emergencies demanded of us, though we ought always to be prepared for it. If every one, as I have shewn above, exerts his earnest endeavours in answering the obligations of his station and calling, and in making a good use of his capacities and powers, he thereby undoubtedly promotes his own interest ; he reaps honour, pleasure and profit, from his industry and skill. But he likewise promotes the welfare of the whole society, which confers on him that honour, that pleasure, that profit, as a recompence for his useful service, and whose prosperity consists in the prosperity of each individual member of it taken together. This connection however between our private interest and the general interest of the whole, does not always happen. Instances occur where they are at variance,

riance, and where therefore we should neglect the former, that we may consult the latter; and as often as we do this, it may be truly said of us, in the strictest acceptation of the words, that we act in a public-spirited and noble manner. Thus, for example, if I renounce my accommodation and my repose, for affording certain services and accommodations to the public, which by my particular vocation I am not obliged to do; if I resign a lucrative post that is offered me, to another who is able to fill it far more worthily; if I refrain from producing an invention, which would procure very great advantage to me and mine, but which would cast a far greater number of my fellow-subjects into poverty and misery; if I publish a secret in medicine, or any other important discovery, which would fill my purse if I kept it close; if I rather chuse to submit to some injury to my health, or even put my life in jeopardy, than neglect something that may be of great public service, or do something that may be of general detriment: I sacrifice in all these cases my own private profit to the general good; and for such circumstances we should constantly be prepared, if we would faithfully follow the precept of the apostle.

To this we were previously obliged by reason, which tells us, that we exist not for ourselves alone, but for others also; that we should prefer

a greater and more durable good, to one far inferior and of shorter duration; that it is no more than just, that we should relinquish such advantages as we owe the possession and enjoyment of to society, whenever its benefit requires us to abandon them; and that in short the consciousness of having acted right and well, far transcends all the damage we may thereby sustain. To this we are laid under much stronger obligations by the christian doctrine. Its professors are to be distinguished from other men not so much by ceremonies and opinions, as by their disinterested, affectionate, beneficent and magnanimous temper and conduct. In this view it gives us the precept: Look not every man on his own things; but every man also on the things of others. In that view it proposes the example of our redeemer, who for our sakes relinquished his glory and took upon him poverty, ignominy, persecution and death, as the pattern for our imitation in all events; and requires, as the apostle directly afterwards adds, that the same mind should be in us, which was also in Christ Jesus. In that view finally it promises to them who deny themselves, who follow Christ, and, like him, hazard much for their brethren, the most glorious recompenses in the future world. What arguments for a disinterested and generous conduct; for that public-minded charity and benevolence, which seeks
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its own happiness in that of its fellow-creatures !

Now lay all these remarks together, my pious hearers, and it will not be difficult for you to acquire plain and just conceptions, how every man without distinction of calling and condition, may and ought to labour at the advancement of the public weal, now in one way, and then in another. We will by way of corollary, deduce a few practical results or prudential rules of action from these remarks.

The first is this : Let every one strive to fill properly the post he occupies in society, by doing that which he may and ought to do according to his station and calling, as completely as he can, as his capacities and abilities permit. This is the easiest and surest method of becoming useful to others. Whence does it arise, that the public prosperity is not more promoted ? Not, because you, or I, or other persons, who account themselves true patriots, and who probably are so too, do not occupy the principal stations, and have not more command and authority over their brethren ; but, because only few worthily fill the stations they actually hold, and do as much good as by means of them they might and should. The generality are not contented with their station : they wish to exchange it for another ; they meddle in affairs that do not belong to them ; whereby they neglect what are properly their own, or perform them not

with so much ardour and alacrity, not so sedulously, not in such a useful manner, as they should. Avoid these faults, my devout hearers, if you be desirous of deservedly bearing the name of public-spirited men and citizens. Let every man, as the scripture speaks, abide in the same calling, wherein he is called. As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. Subjects, citizens, who have no share in the government of the country, nor can have, waste not your time and your faculties in arrogantly investigating and severely criticising the conduct of those who are elevated above you. Strive rather to preserve the sound condition of your own mind, to regulate your own conduct, to act as irreproachably and honourably as you always can. Set not yourselves up for lawgivers, but observe the salutary laws that are already enacted. Fathers and mothers, be not so much troubled about what is passing in the great world, or among your neighbours and acquaintance, as about what is going forward in your own path of duty, in your own houses, in your own families. Train up your children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord; render them wise and virtuous. This is the most important contribution you can pay to the good of the community. Let no man distract himself in too many affairs, and in such as

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are too remote from his calling ; but let every one keep his vocation constantly in view, and seek to answer the obligations of it with all possible exactitude.

The second result or prudential rule of conduct, which we deduce from our remarks, is this : Let no man despise another on account of the station he occupies in society. It is not the station which makes us either respectable or contemptible, but the manner in which we fill it. The day-labourer contributes of what he has to the general prosperity, as well as the statesman ; and he that is most faithful to his obligations, merits undoubtedly the greatest esteem whether moreover he be rich or poor, high or low. The apostle Paul beautifully represents this matter to us in that apt similitude he borrows from the human body. If the whole body, says he, were an eye, where were the hearing ? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling. And if they were all one member, where were the body ? But now hath God ~~set~~ the members, every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him. And now are they many members, yet but one body. The eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee : nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you. Nay, much more those members of the body which seem to be more feeble are necessary. God hath tempered the body together,
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that there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another. Now you are as men and as christians such a body, and one is this, and the other another member of it.

The third and last result or prudential rule of conduct, which we deduce from our remarks, is this: Let every one seek to dignify the affairs of his calling and his manner of life, by the pure and beneficent views he has in them. Let him open every avenue of his heart to that universal and brotherly charity which nature and christi-anity so strongly recommend, and obediently follow their benevolent dictates. Let him allow the fear of God, the desire to please him and to do his will, to be the governing principle of his whole deportment. Let him strive to obtain the unfading renown of being declared on the day of judgment, a good and faithful servant of God. This, my friends, this will confer a particular value on all your affairs and transactions, however mean they may be in themselves, not only in your own eyes, but in the eyes of superior intelligences, if they have any communication with our earth, and are spectators of our actions; in the eyes of almighty God himself, on whose approbation and favourable regards our all depends. For this is and ever will remain an eternal truth: Whosoever has been faithful over a few things, him will the Lord make ruler over many things,

SERMON XXIV.

*How we may and ought to make Religion our
main Concern.*

GOD, from whom all things proceed, by whom they subsist and to whom they belong, eternal and only source of all the comfort, all the joy, all the happiness of which we and all creatures in heaven and on earth are susceptible; how happy we are that thou hast discovered to us thyself and thy will, that thou hast capacitated us for the religion that is designed to conduct us to thee, to renew us after thy image and to unite us with thee! How happy, that we know thee and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent, that we are able to have converse with thee and with thy son, and may find in it all that can enlighten, sanctify, refresh and revive us! Father of men, how can we be sufficiently thankful to thee for these unmerited gifts of thy mercy, for the honour and the felicity to which thou wouldst exalt us? How can we be assiduous enough to render ourselves worthy of these benefits, and well-pleasing to thee by the best application

plication of them ? Ah how many causes hast thou had to withdraw these gifts of thy bounty from us, who have been many a time so careless and ungrateful as to overlook their value, and too seldom to employ them as we ought ! Lord deal not with us after our sins ; reward us not according to our iniquities. Cause thy light, the light of truth, more fully to enlighten us, cause its brightness to be spreading continually farther ; but grant that we may prize it more highly, that we may follow it more faithfully than we have hitherto done. Grant that we may feel in our hearts and manifest by the whole of our conduct, the efficacy of the religion which we confess with our lips. Let its important and sublime contents be ever present to our mind ; let it be a light to our feet, the sole rule of our deportment, the ground of our consolation in life and in death. Bless to that end the meditation on this subject which we are now about to begin ; that it may instruct, convince and effectually improve us. We offer up our petitions to thee, for these and all other blessings, in the name of thy son, our saviour, comprising them in that prayer which he himself prescribed us : Our father, &c.

MATTHEW vi. 33.

Seek ye first the kingdom ~~of~~ God and his righteousness.

YOU have often heard from your teachers, my friends, that we ought to make religion and the care of our everlasting salvation our main concern, postponing all other considerations to it. In teaching and enjoining you this as a duty, we do no more than what our office demands. We lay no burden upon you from which we might exonerate you. We only thus recommend to you what is right and fit and necessary in itself. We assert a thing, the truth of which can at all times be incontestably demonstrated. And yet I think I am not deceived in imagining sometimes that this manner of delivering and enforcing it, occasionally surprises and embarrasses several of them that hear me. It has often seemed to me, as if I heard some of you, otherwise well-disposed, exclaim : But is it not requiring an impossibility of us, to expect that we should make religion our chief concern ? We have a high respect for religion, we are not indifferent to our salvation. We are much rather well-inclined to do all that God requires of us for obtaining it, whenever it is in our power ; and will God require anything of us which we cannot perform ? But how is it possible for us to be continually thinking of religion, continually

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ally to be employed in religion, continually to be providing for our salvation? We have a calling in the world, and surely to that calling we should devote the most of our time, the most of our attention, the most of our faculties. A clergyman indeed may easily make religion his main concern; and he even ought to do so. But we lead a totally different life; we have quite other avocations and affairs to mind. These objections are certainly plausible, my friends. I will even allow that they may at times disturb very honest minds. But they are not proof against a closer examination. The light of truth dispels them presently. They arise merely from wrong notions of the subject in question. By representing it as it actually is, we shall directly find, that God requires nothing impossible of us, and that neither do we, his ministers, make any exorbitant demands. We shall find, that one and the same law is given; and the same duties enjoined, to the clergyman and to him who is no clergyman, in this as in most other respects; and that they both may observe this law and fulfil these duties, if they be but heartily inclined so to do. In order to convince you of this I shall now endeavour by the divine blessing and assistance to shew you, with all possible plainness and simplicity: How we may and ought to make religion our main concern, and how much it is our interest so to do.

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On apprehending this, we shall immediately understand, what our saviour requires, by exhorting us to seek first, or principally and before all things, the kingdom of God and his righteousness. How fortunate shall I esteem myself, if by taking this view of religion which is intended solely to make us wise and virtuous and happy, I may be the means of gaining over some hearts, and of confirming in their generous sentiments such as may be already devoted to it, and are happy in the practice of it, by elevating in their minds the sentiment of their own felicity. O God, let it please thee, to bless my discourse to this purpose. Let the truth be victorious over prejudice and illusion, and the whole tenor of our lives evince the fruits of this glorious conquest !

By making religion our main concern is not implied, to think of nothing else but religion, to be employed in nothing besides religion, to apply all our time, all our faculties, or however the greater part of them, in such meditations, conversations and devotional exercises, as immediately pertain to religion, and for them to neglect and postpone all others. Were we to represent this to you, my friends, as your duty, we should certainly require more of you than you are able to perform ; more than God himself requires at your hands. But neither is this the signification of the expression, to make any-
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thing our main concern. That expression implies nothing else than to be more interested in some particular object than in all others ; to turn one's thoughts more frequently and with more meeting facility that way than any other ; never to lose it totally out of sight ; to do all the rest in reference to it and on its account ; and to be ready, whenever it is necessary, to sacrifice all others to it. A few examples drawn from such things as do not peculiarly relate to religion, will best explain this matter. Suppose a scholar should make some particular branch of science his main concern, or the solution of some certain problem, in history, in medicine, in natural philosophy, or the like, for the sake of throwing some light on any dark district of the kingdom of truth. Does this of course imply, that he thinks solely and constantly with undeviating attention on that subject ; that he despises, neglects, omits, whatever does not directly conduct him to the apprehension of it ? By no means : but it implies, that he never so far loses sight of it, as with deliberate choice to omit anything that may be subservient to the attainment of it. He certainly attends with proper application to the affairs of his calling ; he reads, he hears, he considers innumerable things, that do not peculiarly relate to the train of ideas and inferences which he is pursuing, and are often remote from it : but as he nevertheless frequently

frequently and preferably meditates on that which he makes his main concern ; since he has it very much at heart, every thing in a manner puts him in mind of it, nothing escapes his attention that has any the least reference to it, he immediately applies everything to it, for trying whether it may not give him some light in his pursuit, whether it may not lead him to the track of what he is seeking. In this manner is he concerned about it, at the very time when he is employed in a hundred other affairs, so as to be continually hastening to the object which he has before him.

Or, to render it still more comprehensible, suppose another has a certain project relating to his temporal welfare, and makes the prosecution of this project his main concern. He wishes for example, to obtain some particular preferment, some post of honour, or some lucrative office, which probably he cannot expect to enjoy till after a lapse of several years. This is now become the point on which he lays the greatest stress. What then does that imply ? Is it as much as to say : he henceforth abandons the calling he has hitherto followed, relinquishes all his present occupations and profits ; neglects all the duties of his station and office ; thinks entirely of the post of honour, of the preferment at which he is aiming ? Certainly not. But it is as if we should say : He now acts conformably

ably to the design which he is bent upon. He omits much, he does much, which he would neither omit nor do, if he had not this project in view. The pleasing prospect he keeps before him encourages him to execute with strict fidelity the affairs entrusted to him by the community, that they may be induced hereafter to trust him with more ; and worthily to fill the station he already occupies, that by so doing he may pave the way to one still higher. This hope urges him, on all convenient occasions to cultivate the favour and friendship of those who may any way contribute to the prosecution of his views, and never to do any thing that may reasonably give them offence. It prompts him to obviate all obstructions that may render the attainment of his design difficult or impossible to him. In short he frequently thinks of his future elevation or promotion while engaged in the duties of his profession, amidst the business of his calling ; he often transports himself in idea into his new situation ; he already imperceptibly adopts the manners that are suitable to it ; and rejoices by anticipation in the privileges that are attached to it. This, my friends, is to make anything our main concern, our most interesting object. And the expression has the very same signification in reference to religion.

To make religion the main concern, implies therefore first to be thoroughly impressed with
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the high importance and excellency of it ; and not only to say, but likewise to perceive and feel that far more depends on the perspicuous apprehension of religion, on the firm belief of it, on obedience to its precepts, on the enjoyment of its consolations, and on becoming capable and worthy of its rewards, than on whatever else may merit our attention and esteem. It implies, to take up truly and sincerely the language of the psalmist, when he says : Whom have I in heaven but thee ? if I but have an interest in thee, my God ; if I be but assured of thy grace and favourable regards ; if I do but muse on thee with a cheerful heart, and trust in thee with a well-grounded confidence ; Lord, if I thus have but thee, there is nothing in heaven or on earth that I desire in comparison of thee ! It implies, to believe firmly, that he alone is truly wise and happy, who understands and practises religion, who so reasons and judges and acts as religion requires we should reason and judge and act ; and that no human science, no wealth, no honour, no power, can compensate the defect of the advantages it is calculated to procure us both in the present and the future world. And when once we are thus disposed towards religion, my friends, shall we not be fain to do all we can for being more conversant with its doctrines, its commands, its consolations, and for obtaining a fuller assurance of the truth,

truth, the reasonableness and the excellency of it? Shall we not readily use all the means of public and private instruction, and rejoice more in the augmentation of our knowledge of God and divine things, the confirmation of our faith, the increase of our alacrity in goodness, than in the accumulation of temporal goods, or in procuring our senses a transient gratification? He therefore who does not act in this manner; he who contents himself with a dry and barren speculation, with a fluctuating faith; who catches with avidity at every pretext for absenting himself from the offices of religion; who neither understands nor seeks the satisfaction and delight that are attendant on the due observance of them: of him it certainly cannot be said, that he makes religion his main concern, his most important business, or that he seeks first and principally the kingdom of God and his righteousness. No! he makes a mere by-matter of it, which he postpones to all others, and is never employed in it except when he cannot easily avoid it, or when certain seasons and circumstances mechanically call him to it.

To make religion the main concern, implies secondly, to bear in mind on all occasions, in business as well as in worship, in company as well as in retirement, in the world as well as at church, the doctrines, the commands and the promises of religion: and to consider and judge
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of whatever we do, or whatever befalls us, in the relation it bears to religion and our everlasting salvation. In order to this, we must make ourselves so conversant with these doctrines, with these commands, with these promises, that they shall occur as it were spontaneously and without studious recollection to the mind, that they shall be constantly present to it. This however cannot be, unless we occupy ourselves on these objects in the quiet hours of abstraction and retirement ; unless we there learn to apply the general doctrines and precepts of religion to our own particular circumstances, and thus prepare ourselves for all events that may happen to us at other times. He who does this, who does it frequently and with pleasure, will never, even in the tumult and bustle of the world, so far lose sight of religion, but that everything will lead him to it, and excite pious sentiments and emotions within him. Do his affairs for instance, prosperously go on ; do such occurrences offer, as are useful to him or his, in a greater or lesser degree : he ascribes this good fortune to the superintending agency of divine providence ; he gratefully receives it as the free gift of divine bounty ; he tastes and sees in the cheerful enjoyment of it, how gracious the Lord is ; and feels a renovated zeal within him to love this bountiful God, and to obey him from motives of gratitude and affection.

tion. On the contrary, does some adverse event befall him ; are his projects defeated ; do his exertions miscarry : he confesses and adores even then the will of him who presides over all supreme, and whose government is blameless and irreproachable. Does he meet with crosses and disappointments in the honest discharge of his duties ; does he see perils before him which he cannot avoid ; his heart ascends to the Almighty, his father and God ; trusting in his support, he meets these difficulties, these dangers with courage and intrepidity, convinced that the man who is faithful to his duties must at length be happy in the kingdom of a wise and righteous deity. Does he perceive ignorant, vicious, miserable men in the world ; religion impregnates his heart with the most active compassion towards them ; he praises his merciful father in heaven for the unmerited advantages he possesses above them ; and prefers ardent supplications to the throne of grace, for their illumination, their amendment and their deliverance. Does he see sinners and fools, acting wickedly without restraint, and yet apparently happy ; religion tells him to consider the end of these men, teaches him to distinguish specious appearances from reality, and warns him not to suffer his virtue and piety to be disturbed at the sight. And so it is in a hundred other examples. He who makes religion his main concern,

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is referred by all things to it, is reminded of its doctrines, its commands and its consolations; he considers all things in the light which it diffuses over him and on all around him.

To make religion the main concern, implies thirdly, at all times to maintain the pious and virtuous frame of mind with which it is the tendency of religion to inspire us, and to let it appear in the whole of our demeanour. And what is that frame of mind? It is the sincere and predominant desire to please God and to do his will; it is the earnest and ever-active effort to resemble Christ our saviour, and thereby to become susceptible of the felicity which he has promised us. If then, my pious hearers, you earnestly hope in this respect to do the will of God and to please him, to follow your secular calling with fidelity and diligence, and conscientiously to decline all injustice, all deceit, all circumvention in your dealings with your neighbour; if you preserve the apprehension of the omnipresence and the omniscience of God, even whenever you could practise those arts without danger of being detected or punished or disgraced by mankind; if the idea that it is God who has placed you in the station where you are, grants you courage and fortitude to endure with patience every vexation and hardship that is connected with it, and cheerfully to execute all the businesses it engages you in, because

God requires that you should transact them; if, with a prudent and continued industry to promote your happiness and that of others, you leave to divine providence the issue of your endeavours, and even then are satisfied with it when it does not tally with your wishes, because you know and believe that it is consistent with the views and the will of your God, and is consequently just and fitting; if you perform to your neighbour the offices of humanity, of complaisance, and kindness, not from self-interest, not from ambition, not from constraint, but solely because you love him as your brother according to the precept of the gospel, because you know that God has commended him to your affection, your solicitude and your assistance, because you perceive and feel that nothing is more noble than to imitate God in his universal and unwearied beneficence, and to resemble Jesus, that amiable friend of man: if you thus constantly think and act, thus constantly practise religion; you give positive proof that you have made it your main concern, your most important business, though you bestow your attention likewise on a hundred other matters, and are employed in a hundred other affairs; because you at all times preserve the pious and christian temper, and demean yourself consistently with the pious and christian dispositions which religion is calculated to inspire.

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To make religion the main concern, lastly means, in all cases, where we must either transgress the precepts of religion, or renounce and neglect other objects, always to give the preference to religion. It means, to avoid and set at nought without hesitation, whatever is inconsistent with the fear of God, with real virtue and sincere devotion. If therefore the world points out to me the means of becoming rich and great, and religion forbids me the use of those means, as being unjust and injurious to my neighbour; I must reject those means with abhorrence, if I make religion my main concern, and rather chuse to remain poor and mean than seek to become rich and great by violating its injunctions and by forfeiting its consolations. If the world offer me pleasures, against which I am warned by religion, because they would debase my mind, corrupt my taste, or be scandalous and injurious to my fellow-creatures; then must I, if I make religion my main concern, eschew those unlawful pleasures, and rather do violence to my flesh and blood, to my corrupted nature, than expose myself to the hazard of displeasing God. If an opportunity present itself to revenge me on my enemies, to retaliate evil with evil, and religion call out to me: **Avenge not thyself; love thy enemy; do him good; imitate thy father in heaven, thy magnanimous redeemer:** then must I, if I make religion my
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main concern, follow her voice without delay, and stifle every rancorous thought in its birth. If my circumstances, my affairs, my connections with others, urge me to lead a life of dissipation, and to pass the greatest part of the leisure that my vocation leaves me, though not in heinous sins and enormities, yet in idle amusements, in frivolous diversions and impertinent trifles ; and religion say to me, by this means thou wilt never get forward in knowledge and virtue ; by this means thou wilt gradually enervate and at length totally lose the good sentiments and aptnesses thou hast already acquired ; by this means it will be impossible for thee to fulfil the vocation of a christian, and to become capable of the supreme felicity that awaits the christian in the other world : then must I, if I make religion my main concern, employ my leisure better ; and though I need not retire from all innocent companies and recreations, yet must I take care that the exercises of private devotion receive no injury from them. I must prefer reflection, prayer, self-examination and meditation on the divine word, to every kind of pastime. The solemn hours in which my soul is busied with herself, with God and with futurity, should to me be hours of the choicest recreation, of the sweetest pleasure. This, my friends, this is what is implied by making religion the main concern ; this is the signification
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of seeking first and especially the kingdom of God and his righteousness. This is what God, this is what our true happiness requires ; and he who thinks these demands exorbitant, and holds the compliance with them to be impracticable, is still far, very far, from the kingdom of God.

Happy the man who knows these things, and acts agreeably to his knowledge. The advantages it will procure him are no less various than great. We can now only notice them in a cursory manner.

He who makes religion his main concern, has her for the safest guide, conducting him in all his ways, the wisest and faithfulest counsellor, never forsaking him in the most trying events. She instructs him at all times in his duties, and how he shall best acquit himself of them: She warns him of all that may be injurious to his soul and prejudicial to his eternal salvation. She lays open to him the hidden snares in which the world and his own heart are endeavouring to take him. She inspires him with courage when he is summoned to fight against sin, and communicates to him so much force and vigour, notwithstanding his own diffidence in himself, by her doctrines and promises, that he can go on conquering and to conquer, and persevere unto the end. While he adheres to her, and follows her wise suggestions, he walks an even path, and cannot fail of the glorious prize for which he is contending.

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He who makes religion his main concern is farther entitled to all her divine consolations, and fully relishes the sweetness of them. The cogent motives she gives us to patience, to contentedness, to confidence, to hope, are ever present to his mind. Ere trouble is strong enough to master his heart, and to fill it with darkness and affright, religion has cheered him already with her radiance, and opened to him such delightful prospects in boundless futurity, as to make it impossible for him, yes, my friends, I do not employ too strong an expression, as to make it impossible for him to yield to dejection, or sink into remediless despondency and sorrow. What an especial privilege then does he in this respect possess who constantly makes religion his main concern, above him who only occasionally follows after her, and never flees to her sanctuary except in time of distress! By the former she continually stands as his faithful friend; she spontaneously offers him her help, her support, her consolations, as soon as he needs them. He knows, he understands her gentle voice; he has often already experienced her efficacy; he knows that he may trust to her support; and before he can fall, before he can sink, she holds him by his right hand, and sets his feet upon a rock. To the latter on the contrary, to him who pursues religion as a by-matter, and only flees to her sanctuary in time of need,

need, she is coy and reserved. He has indeed heard that she can succour mankind, restore and console them, when evil befalls them ; but he is not intimately enough connected with her, for promising himself that assistance, that refreshment, that consolation from her. He has rendered her shy of him by the indifference that he has shewn her in the time of his prosperity. He can now only sue to her as to a neglected and affronted friend ; he has to gain an intimacy with her ; he must be contented to hear bitter reproaches from her ; he must bear with her upbraidings as the author of his own misfortunes ; and frequently abide long in suspense between fear and hope, ere she will speak to him of peace, and grant him the soothing succour of the promises of God. Nay it not unfrequently happens, that, after he has long disregarded her, he will have to forego all her consolations, and experience the truth of that awful denunciation : Because I have called and ye refused ; I have stretched out my hand and no man regarded ; but ye have set at nought all my counsel and would none of my reproof ; I also will laugh at your calamity, I will mock when your fear cometh.

Lastly, my friends, the man who makes religion his main concern, is at all times in such a frame, that he may reasonably promise himself the everlasting felicity, an entrance into the heavenly

heavenly kingdom of God. He is at all times prepared to leave this world for the next, and needs not be afraid of losing by the exchange. Let providence call him suddenly hence, or let death approach him with tedious steps, his most important affairs are already dispatched. His temper needs no alteration in order to fit him for a better and more perfect state. He already thinks and judges respecting the most essential matters, as the blessed in heaven think of them and judge. He now acts on the principles that have stamp and currency there; he here understands and loves the pleasures which there are understood and loved. Quite different is the case with him who in the day of prosperity has lost sight of religion, who coldly pursues it as a business of little moment, and defers to seek the kingdom of God till the latter days of his life. On their arrival he perceives the importance of those objects; fain would he now make them his main concern. Now he is anxious for instruction and comfort. Now he exclaims with the psalmist: Lord, whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire in comparison of thee! Now he sends for the teacher of religion. He is to bring her consolations to him: He is to prepare him for death, and fit him for admission into the kingdom of God. What a demand! We are to comfort a man who has never hitherto concerned

concerned himself about the duties of religion, who has deliberately contemned and transgressed her most sacred injunctions; we are to console him with her promises! Can we do it without deluding him with false hopes, and wounding our own conscience? In a few days, in a few hours, we are to change him into a quite different man, give him a different mind, direct his desires and his taste to quite other objects. Is this probable? Is this possible? Or has God anywhere promised, that by the ministration of his word and by the teachers of it, he will perform such miracles on the sick and the dying? No, he who in his lifetime will not make religion his main concern, has but little consolation and aid to expect from her when lying on his deathbed. He who in his better days neglects to consider and treat the seeking of the kingdom of God and his righteousness as the most important concern of man, runs the greatest hazard of being excluded from that heavenly kingdom, though at the end of his life he be never so solicitous to enter it.

What then shall we do, my pious hearers? On what shall we determine? Shall we still regard and prosecute religion and the care of our eternal salvation with negligence, with coldness and indifference, as many, as probably the greater part of us have hitherto done? Shall we still make a mere by-matter of this most interesting of all concerns, on which we are only
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to think, and in which we are only to be occupied, when we know not which way else to turn, or when we are urged to it by some particular solemnities, by misfortunes and tribulations, or by the terrors of death? Shall we still be so senseless and infatuated, as to employ ourselves only at stated times and in particular places about concerns which we can never neglect without prejudice, which are necessary, useful and comfortable to us at all times and in all places, and thus lose the real utility that we might reap from them? For this is certain, either we must make religion our main concern, in the manner above laid down, and submit to be constantly actuated, governed and conducted by her, or we have no benefit from her to expect. And shall we still hesitate how we should determine, what party we should espouse! — No, no, divine religion, heavenly instructress, thou best, sole comforter in life and death, thee will we venerate as the most precious boon of the mercy of our God; to thy counsels, to thy conduct, we will cheerfully submit; thy commands alone we will readily obey; thy spirit shall constantly inspire and animate ours. Come, fix thy dwelling in our hearts; enlighten them with thy light; kindle in them a fervent love to God and Christ; replenish them with wisdom and virtue; and give us to experience, that thy ways are ways of pleasantness, that thy paths are happiness and peace!

SERMON XXV.

The christian Preparation for future Sufferings.

GOD, thy wise providence has placed us here on earth in a state of vicissitude. It has rendered us susceptible of numerous satisfactions, prepared for our enjoyment many goods and pleasures, but likewise subjected us to various pains and sufferings, because even these in their ultimate tendencies are sources of joy to us. Our body is frail ; the outward, visible things, that surround us, are frail ; both the one and the other are ever changing, and our welfare and our fortunes vary with them. But our spirit is by thy gracious determination incorruptible and immortal ; amidst all the changes and vicissitudes that happen around it, it is its especial privilege to suffer nothing, to be by them only set in greater activity, to be disciplined in virtue and to become gradually more perfect. All depends on thee ; all is regulated by thee to wise and gracious purposes ; all is and will be in thy paternal hand means conducing to felicity.

city. Thy aid and support are constantly near us: and thy complacency is able to supply the defect or the loss of all beside. Sorrow as well as joy is adapted to conduct us to thee and to our higher destination. In thy son Jesus thou hast given us the best, the faithfullest forerunner on that career, and by his exaltation to thy right hand the most infallible demonstration of the glorious termination of it. Oh teach us still more clearly to discern, still more firmly to believe this truth, and let it constantly have greater influence on our behaviour. Bless now our meditations on these important topics. Grant that we may so learn to adapt and prepare ourselves for whatever afflictions may still betide us, as becomes thy children and the followers of thy son Jesus. For this we pray thee in his name, and address thee further as he vouchsafed to teach us: Our father, &c.

MATTH. XX. 17, 18, 19.

And Jesus going up to Jerusalem, took the twelve disciples apart in the way, and said unto them, Behold we go up to Jerusalem; and the son of man shall be betrayed unto the chief priests, and unto the scribes, and they shall condemn him to death, and shall deliver him to the Gentiles, to mock and to scourge and to crucify him: and the third day he shall rise again.

THERE are but too many, who, while things go prosperously with them, studiously avoid all ideas

ideas of any possible or probable alteration in their welfare, fondly imagining, that such ideas are incompatible with the enjoyment of the present good. Are they in health, they shun every thought of sickness and pain ; do they feel themselves in the full vigour of life, they avoid whatever might remind them of death ; are they in prosperity, they think as seldom as possible on the instability of fortune. We should enjoy the good, say they, as long as we have it, and not embitter its enjoyment, by anticipating the time when we perhaps can no longer call it our's. Pains, diseases, crosses and disappointments, misfortunes, old age and death, come always early enough ; are always unpleasant and horrible enough. Why should we feel them by anticipation, and thus multiply and magnify our sufferings ? — That certainly we ought not to do, my pious hearers, and that neither does the wise man and the christian. But this he does : he takes every object for what it is ; represents it to himself as it is ; therefore cannot represent to himself what is transitory as permanent, what is uncertain as certain, what lasts only a short time as enduring for ever. — — And then he is well apprised what a difference it makes, to be attacked unprepared by afflictions and misfortunes, or to be continually in readiness to meet them ; — knowing, that in the former case they are ten times more painful, ten times more heavy,

heavy, ten times more intolerable than in the latter; knowing, that the enjoyment of the present to the exclusion of all ideas of the future is more the state of a dreaming than of a waking man, rather the instinctive headlong course of the brute creation than the proceeding of a being endowed with discriminating sagacity and foresight. So far are we therefore from wishing to disturb you in the liberal and genial enjoyment of any kind of prosperity, my pious hearers, that we readily grant you all innocent satisfactions and pleasures; requesting however that you would not forget the future for them; that you would at times direct your attention even to the disagreeable and disastrous they may contain. And to this we are incited by what we read concerning Jesus in our text, and on which we shall now proceed more particularly to discourse.

Jesus speaks frequently and circumstantially of his approaching sufferings and death. Behold, says he in our text to his disciples, behold we go up to Jerusalem; and the son of man shall be betrayed unto the chief priests and unto the scribes, and they shall condemn him to death, and shall deliver him to the Gentiles, to mock and to scourge and to crucify him; and the third day he shall rise again. As our lord had the foreknowledge of his sufferings, — knew the ends and consequences of them, — knew, that he was to learn and to exercise himself in obedience

dience by sufferings, that by suffering and dying he was to be the model and the comforter of all the afflicted and suffering and dying, that by suffering he was to accomplish the will of his father, to promote the salvation of his brethren and enter into glory : so his sufferings could not but be greatly interesting to him ; they must often have employed his thoughts, often have occurred to his imagination, and have had a multifarious influence on his judgment and behaviour. He could communicate to his disciples but little of what in this respect he thought and felt ; it was then too far above their comprehension. But even the little that he disclosed of them, shews, how far he was from endeavouring to banish those thoughts, with what precision and reality they presented themselves to his mind, how frequently they not only occupied him in retirement, but accompanied him also in the society of his friends. And in this manner did he render those ideas familiar to him, accommodate himself to his sufferings, learn to view and consider them on their right side and collect courage and fortitude for sustaining them. Accordingly they came upon him not unprepared, surprised and confounded him not, and if they bore hard upon him, if he felt their whole pressure, yet could they not crush nor dishearten him. Neither does it appear that these thoughts were any interruption to his wonted cheerfulness

and serenity of mind, or that they were any discouragement to him in the performance of the work on earth committed to him. We hear him speak with calmness and resignation of his approaching sufferings, and behold him unweariedly acting and working as long as he is enlightened by the light of life.

Our saviour may and should be a pattern to us likewise in this respect. We have indeed neither that certainty nor the circumstantial and specific apprehension of the sufferings that await us, which he had of his. But even for barely possible, for more or less probable reverses in his situation the wise man and the christian always prepares his mind. And how? For the investigation of this I have designed my present discourse. We will therefore, my pious hearers, consult how we should dispose and accommodate ourselves to the afflictions and misfortunes that may some time or other befall us.

First, we should frequently represent to ourselves those afflictions and misfortunes, to which we are liable by our nature and our habitudes with other things and from which therefore we can never be entirely safe, as what may consequently befall us, in order that we may be the less surprised, if sooner or later that happens. We should therefore frequently say to ourselves: How uncertain, how frail are all the ingredients that make the happiness of this life! What revolutions

tions may take place at one time or another, of one kind or a hundred others, in my outward situation ! — At present I am in health, free from pain and trouble, can use my organs of sense, — the several members of my body conformably to their destination, unimpededly attend to the affairs of my calling, and fully and freely enjoy the pleasure that offers. But how soon, either by or without any guilty conduct of my own, may some latent germ of disease spring up within me ; how soon may my senses by internal distemper or outward accident be weakened or obtused ; my limbs lose their pliancy and strength, my solids or my fluids be disordered and obstructed in their motions and actions ! And how far from surprising would it be were that to happen, seeing it daily falls to the lot of so many of my brethren and sisters, who are now as healthy and vigorous as myself ! — At present I can employ my mental faculties without painful exertion, with facility and success. I can think freely and without restraint : one thought quickly begets a thousand others in my mind : they all spontaneously occur to it, and separate or combine in obedience to its volition according to the laws of truth and order, and as its exigencies and purposes require : memory, attention, imagination, sagacity are as it were at my command. But who knows whether they may not refuse their office, whether they will not decline with increasing years, whether

then any degree of reflection may not fatigue and exhaust me, whether some unfortunate accident may not create disorder and confusion in my mind or in its organs, whether it will not entirely fail under the infirmities of my body, previous to its departure from it? — — At present my affairs are in a flourishing state. God blesses my application and industry : he sends me more than I want, and allows me to enjoy the conveniencies and accommodations of life. But it by no means follows, that I shall always enjoy them, that I shall live in this kind of affluence to the end of my days. How numerous the obstacles I may sooner or later meet with in the prosecution of my calling ! What untoward alterations may my business, my commerce, the means of my support experience ! What unexpected and unavoidable misfortunes may arise to defeat my best concerted plans and undertakings ! How easily may I even fall into poverty and indigence ! — — At present I live among friends, who are dear to me and by whom I am valued ; among friends, the sight of whom inspires me with joy, whose intercourse is a solace and recreation to me, whose conversation, whose advice and example instruct, improve, encourage me, whose assiduous affection affords me actual assistance and faithful support. But these friends are frail and mortal, like myself ; I may be bereaved of them to-day, they may be ravished from
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from me to-morrow ; and then I must proceed solitarily on the journey of life, can neither participate with them in the satisfactions or the inconveniences of it; and yet by that event nothing happens to me, but what must sooner or later, in the ordinary course of nature, befall every susceptible heart. — At present I have children ; children, in whom I revere the dignity of innocence and the image of God ; children, in whom I discern easy prognostics of future excellence, great capacities, good and generous affections, who, like beautiful plants, begin to expand and blossom, and from whom I promise myself and society much generous fruit. But how easily, how quickly may storms and tempests arise and demolish these tender scions ! Perhaps they may be doomed to wither in their early bloom ; perhaps, when just entered the world, they must long before me make their exit from this changeable scene, only raising expectations without fulfilling them, only opening delightful prospects, to be immediately closed in darkness and night, only indicating what they might be and become, and then be removed to be and become it in another, a superior state ; and this is however the lot of so great a part of the human race, that certainly they to whom it happens experience nothing singular, nothing extraordinary. — At present I am honoured, esteemed ; fill the place I occupy among my brethren to their satisfaction,

satisfaction, am able to operate far around me and have much influence on others. But may not envy and jealousy, may not slander and calumny, rob me of some part of this honour and esteem? May not fickleness, levity, selfishness, the tyranny of fashion, the mutability of public opinion, or other casualties obscure my respect and contract my sphere of operation? May not a thousand others circumvent me on my course, and snatch from me, by foul means or by fair, the reward of my industry, my fidelity, my desert? — At present I am in the brave enjoyment of life, alert and in high spirits; am in fear of no danger; am resolute in all events and execute my projects with satisfaction; am contented with the present and look forward to the future without trepidation. But may I not soon lose this bravery of life, this alacrity, this happy flow of animal spirits? May I not like so many others, who formerly were as happy, become timid, apprehensive, irresolute, anxious, suspicious, pusillanimous? How soon may the springs of health be relaxed! May I not one day or another be confined to a gloomy sick-bed? Lie sighing on it for whole years together, and thus lead a languishing, inactive, deathlike life? — What is more common than such a vicissitude? What is more usual than such alterations and reverses in the state of health, in outward connexions and relations, in the course of affairs, in temporal

temporal prospects and expectations, in the activity and ability, in the welfare of mankind? How many afflictions, how many disappointments and misfortunes may then betide me? And how probable is it that I may not remain at least entirely free from any? How little therefore ought I to be surprised, if they actually come upon me sooner or later, and cause me to feel that here below all is subject to inconstancy and vanity!

These sentiments alone however cannot enable us properly to make up our minds to the afflictions and disappointments that may betide us. We must secondly acquire the habit of considering ourselves and all our destinies, all that befalls or may befall us of good or evil, in its dependance on the great disposing mind of all. Thus, and thus alone do the prospects of the possible or probable evils and misfortunes, to which we are liable, lose the terrible and dejecting which of themselves they possess, and which they would retain, if they depended on chance or accident. We must therefore proceed to say: However frail my health, my life, my abilities, my welfare, my possessions, my friends, my children; they are nevertheless all at the disposal and under the protection of him who gave them to me, and without his will, without his permission none can bereave me of them. However various and great the afflictions, the pains, the misfortunes,
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the calamities, that may assail me ; yet they are all dispensed, disposed, removed, inflicted, mitigated, abridged, imposed and dismissed, by him who governs heaven and earth, who regulates the little as well as the great, and without whom nothing can be and nothing happen. How numerous and rapid soever the changes and revolutions to which all terrestrial, visible things, all human projects and undertakings and contingencies are subject ; yet these changes and revolutions follow the laws of that perfect order, that all-embracing, all-involving plan, which conducts the universe of things nearer to their destination and ultimately will reduce them to the most beautiful harmony. Dependent as I am in all respects, and little as I can rely on outward objects ; yet I depend not on chance, on a blind and fatal necessity, on an austere, despotic ruler, but on sovereign wisdom and goodness, on the best of beings, my most gracious father in heaven, and on him I may securely rely, to him I may safely commit myself and my destinies, even though heaven and earth should pass away. Whatever afflictions then, whatever calamities may await me, they will be appointed, apportioned, regulated, by him, the Allwise, the All-gracious ; they will befall me at that time, in that manner and proportion, will press upon me so long, or be removed from me so soon, as seems good to him, and what he ordains and does, is right and good, is conducive to happiness.

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Would we properly accommodate ourselves and previously make up our minds to the afflictions that may at any time befall us ; we must not thirdly shun the sight and company of the afflicted, but rather learn of them how to act in similar cases, and what we have then to avoid. Indeed, while we are brisk and prosperous we prefer the society of the affluent to that of the unfortunate, the converse of the lively and gay to that of the sorrowful. Nevertheless it is frequently better, according to the sentence of the wise man, to go to the house of mourning than to the house of feasting ; for that is the end of all men, and the living will lay it to heart. And certainly, my dearest friends, the company of the afflicted, the friendly participation in their sufferings may prove to us an excellent school of wisdom and virtue. There we make ourselves conversant with affliction, with the nature, the causes and effects of it ; so that if hereafter it happen to us, it will not take us by surprise. There we learn, not merely to repeat by rote fine speeches on the inconstancy of outward welfare, the frailty of our powers, the instability of life, the folly of pride and ostentation, but to apprehend them sensibly and to feel them intimately. There our heart tells us, that we are like beings with our suffering brethren and sisters, and as liable as they to the same pains and casualties and reverses of fortune. But there likewise we
learn,

learn, what embitters or alleviates afflictions to a man, what disquiets or soothes him under them, what augments or worries, diminishes or confirms his patience, his courage, his fortitude. There we see the various and diffusive influence which his former perceptions, sentiments, dispositions, actions have upon his deportment in affliction. There on the one hand we are frequently fain to say to ourselves: Ah if this unhappy man had not himself alone to blame for his distress, how much more easily would he now sustain the burthen of poverty, or of scorn, or of an humble station! — If this infirm, this debilitated person had passed his best days and years in useful industry, and so had been truly beneficial to himself and others, how little need he be ashamed of his present weakness and inaction, how calmly might he now enjoy the fruits of his former diligence! — If this sufferer had acquainted and familiarized himself betimes with the doctrines of religion and christianity, how much consolation might he now derive from them! — If this forlorn, this childless, this now solitary friend or spouse, had moderated his attachment to these objects of his affection, had expanded his heart so as to nourish in it more love to God and all mankind, how much easier would he now endure his loss, how much more fortitude would he retain! If this sick or dying person could look back on a virtuous, pious life
and

and expect with confidence a blessed hereafter, how much more placid and resigned would he be in his sickness and at the approach of death ! — On the other hand, my pious hearers, converse with the afflicted and the sight of their virtues and their serenity of mind likewise furnish us with numerous opportunities for saying to ourselves : Thus little does the upright man, elate in the consciousness of his innocence, disturb himself about the partial, perverse, uncharitable judgments of his fellow creatures, and allow them to abate his courage ! Thus resignedly, thus with the cheerful simplicity of a child does the sincere christian submit to the will of his heavenly father, whatever he may decree concerning him ! Thus has he learnt in whatsoever state he is therewith to be content, has learnt to conform to all the vicissitudes of his condition as divine dispensations, and can do all things through Christ who strengthens him ! Thus resolutely does he bear and endure even the most aggravated misfortunes ! So far is he from having lost his all by the loss of property, or friends, or children ! So far is he from being totally undone, even though his outward possessions are ravished from him ! Thus patient in sickness is he who steadily fixes his eyes on God and Jesus, and acquiescently follows his saviour ! Thus peacefully dies the just man, who can look backward on a well-spent life, and
forward

forward to a better state of existence!—If therefore the sight of the afflicted and converse with them give rise to such observations and reflections, what an efficacious admonition to us should it be to avoid whatever may hereafter add to the weight of our afflictions or even render them intolerable, and how great the excitation it should give us to do now and to exercise ourselves in whatever may then administer to us consolation and support, and tend to the alleviation and wise use of our afflictions!

These considerations, my pious hearers, lead me to another, no less essentially pertinent to the subject. Would we prepare and make up our minds to the reverses and afflictions, that may befall us in future, we must fourthly acquire such possessions, privileges, preservatives and remedies, such friends and confidants, such satisfactions and felicities, as no accident, no vicissitude of external objects can entirely ravish from us, and which we shall even then retain and enjoy, though we should lose all others. Accordingly, while in prosperity, in health, in the full enjoyment of halcyon days, we should frequently ask ourselves: But if now such a loss, such a misfortune were actually to befall me, if such reverses were really to happen with regard to my faculties, my health, my vivacity, my business, my outward connexions, my friends and possessions and endowments, what resources
have

have I left? What should I be able to save from the wreck and ruin of my external well being? What shall I then preserve that may prevent me from being entirely destitute, and for being easy in misfortune? What is there within me or without that is permanent and unperishable, on which I may build my contentment and my happiness, and by which I may secure it against all the storms of adversity? — Have I not a spirit that is immortal, that will be constantly becoming more perfect, and which cannot lose the perfection it has once attained, as I lose outward transitory things? Is not the foundation of my tranquillity, of my solace, of my contentment, of my happiness laid in my mind, in its temper and disposition, in the state and direction of its appetites and affections, in the consciousness of my own integrity, in its relation to the supreme, all-perfect mind and in the sentiment of its higher never ending duration? If I therefore provide for my mind; if I labour at its cultivation and improvement; if I strive still further to advance in wisdom, in virtue and piety; if I study to judge always more justly, always to think more liberally and as becomes a christian; if I progressively habituate myself to consider and to treat all as discipline and preparation to a superior state: I thereby procure myself a solid stock of comfort and joy, whereof nothing can deprive me; I thereby promote my intrinsic perfection, which no lapse of ages can under-
mine,

mine, which will survive the ruin of all terrestrial objects. — And the creator, the preserver of my spirit, is he not infinitely exalted above all the changes and revolutions of things? Is he not and will he not for ever remain the Allwise, the Almighty, the Allgracious, who has been from all eternity and will be to everlasting? And if I be assured of his paternal affection, of his complacency; if I have him for my patron and my friend: how can I then be wretched or distressed, how miss the goal of true felicity? To him, the Eternal, therefore will I constantly adhere, and ever strive to become more susceptible of his favour; my spirit, which is immortal, shall be the principal object of my care by continual efforts after spiritual perfection: thus, whenever afflictions and misfortunes assail me, I shall never lose my all, but only resign that which is of the least consequence, always preserving my chief advantages, and the purest, the richest sources of consolation, of joy, of felicity will never be closed against me.

Finally, my pious hearers, we must in the same design confirm by reflection our faith in those doctrines of religion and christianity which have the power of mitigating to us the pressure of those afflictions whenever they come upon us. And how manifold and efficacious are those doctrines! Here we should meditate on the paternal providence and love of God, which embraces all,
disposes

disposes and leads all to perfection and happiness ; which overlooks and mistakes nothing, which disdains and neglects nothing as unworthy of its care ; which intends our benefit in adversity as well as in prosperity ; and will never suffer us to be tempted above that we are able to bear, proportioning every affliction to our strength and necessities, and never imposing an affliction upon us, because it is affliction or causes pain, but only because in its tendencies it is subservient to our improvement and felicity. — Here we should farther consider, how needful and salutary to us in the present state such chastenings are ; how greatly they conduce to correct our judgments and to refine and ennoble our dispositions ; of how many failings they cure us, in what various ways we are exercised by them in wisdom and virtue, quickened to the use and exertion of our powers, and educated for a superior, a better life. — — Here we should likewise confirm our faith in the assistance and support which God has promised to afford us in every time of need, and deeply imprint in our hearts these and the like arguments of consolation as so many established truths ; Should mankind hereafter forsake me, yet God will never forsake me : should I meet with ever so many obstacles in the way of my calling and duty, yet the Almighty will help me to surmount them, or reconcile me to the inability to do so : should I even lose my property,

property, my children, my friends, yet he remains who gave them to me, who can restore them to me and in one way or another more than compensate me for them ; should I become ever so infirm, yet he by whom I exist and live both can and will shew himself mighty in my weakness, and sooner or later renew my strength, and enable me to attempt and achieve, what in his empire is to be attempted and achieved by me : should I even lose, without any default of mine, the approbation and favour of my brethren, yet there remain to me the favour and approbation of him who alone judges right and whose loving-kindness is better than life itself. — — Here should we lastly, my pious hearers, constantly consider the present in its connexion with the future, and when we turn our thoughts on the afflictions that may befall us, at the same time constantly reason thus : This is however the road that leads to perfection, the road by which Jesus, our leader and forerunner, and before him and since him whole-hosts of the just and good, the noble army of martyrs, have arrived at the object of all their desires. Let this road be ever so difficult ; it should suffice that it leads to the goal, and that when we have reached it, we forget all former difficulties and hardships, or rather look back upon them with joy and thanksgiving !

And this, my dearest friends, is the wise and christian method of arming and preparing ourselves

selves for the reverses and afflictions that may assail us in future. Whoever thus frequently anticipates them ; considers them in their dependence on God ; wisely profits by the sight of the afflicted and converse with them ; is solicitous betimes about intrinsic perfection and permanent possessions, and makes himself thoroughly conversant with the comfortable doctrines of religion and christianity ; will not be attacked unprepared by any misfortune, by any affliction, will be properly attempered and prepared for all events, will never be deficient in reasons for tranquillity and consolation. He will meet his sufferings as Jesus met, and bear them as he bore his.

Some however may perhaps object: if now these afflictions, these disasters should not befall me, if God in his mercy should preserve to me my health, my faculties, my affluence, the possession of my children, my property, my friends, my honour to the end of my days ; if his protection and his blessing should accompany me in all events and even into the grave : to what purpose then these lamentable speculations, these anticipations and presentiments of evils, that are barely possible ; to what purpose this casing myself in armour against enemies with whom I may never have to contend ? To this purpose, o christian : that thou mayst have a livelier sense of thy happiness and the goodness of thy God, that thou mayst more fervently and joyfully testify thy gratitude.

to him for them, that thou mayst learn to view these still possible evils with greater calmness and resignation, and by reflection at least exercise thyself in those christian dispositions and virtues, to the exertion and practice whereof thou art not excited by any afflictions and calamities of thy own. However thou wilt certainly lose nothing by such considerations and preparations for affliction. They will shield thee from pride and presumption, from the abuse of thy good fortune, fortify thy trust in God, keep alive in thee the sentiment of thy natural weakness and dependence, teach thee to be continually more earnest in thy pursuit after real, durable perfection, and render thee more compassionate, kind and serviceable to thy suffering brethren. And the oftener thou engagest in such considerations, the less melancholy will they prove to thee, and the more nourishment wilt thou always find in them for thy christian piety and virtue.

To conclude; employ, my christian brother, thy time, thy faculties, thy wealth, while thou hast them, in such a manner, as thou wilt hereafter wish thou hadst employed them, and do so with a cheerful heart, even though thou art not certain of their continuance. Lay up treasures, while yet thou hast it in thy power, and principally lay up treasures, which can neither be corrupted by time nor destroyed by violence. Provide for the future, ere yet it arrive; finish thy task,
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ere the night come upon thee. Strive to acquire a truly christian temper, such as God approves ; and, persevering in it, leave it to thy father in heaven, whether any and what kind of afflictions are to befall thee for the exercise of thy faith and virtue, nothing doubting that under his inspection and controul they will ultimately tend to thy everlasting benefit.

SERMON XXVI.

How well it is for Mankind that they are ignorant of the Future.

GOD, from thee, the Omniscient, no secrets are hid. All things are naked and open to thy view; the possible as well as the actual, the future as well as the past and the present. Thy unbounded intellect comprehends the whole and every part of the immense series of things that have been and are and ever will be. Thee we adore in profound humility as the supremely, the only* perfect being. In the sentiment of our inanity we prostrate ourselves before thee in the dust, acknowledging and feeling the limitations prescribed us. We are surrounded by clouds and darkness in various respects. Ignorance and error in innumerable instances are our unavoidable lot. But too apt are the uncertain views we take of the present to be confused, and the future is for the most part concealed from our eyes. Yet far be it from us to be ashamed of our limitations, or to murmur at thy disposals and decrees. No; here also we re-
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vere thy wise providence, which has so constituted all as is most suitable to our nature, to our destination and to the state of education and discipline, in which we are placed. No; our feeble optics at present could not endure that radiant light which thou hast veiled from our eyes. Far from enlightening and leading us safely, it would dazzle and confound us, and bring us into perilous deviations. Of the gentle, dawning light, that is needful at present for us, in order to become wise and good and happy, thou sufferest us to experience no want, and if we faithfully follow its guiding ray, we may be sure of reaching the prize to which we are stretching forward. Yes, it is in thy benignity, thy parental tenderness, that thou hast veiled the future from us in impenetrable clouds. Of thee, the All wise and All-gracious, we may confidently and calmly expect its gradual development. It can never be tremendous to us, thy children, who know and love thee as the universal parent. Oh teach us continually better to understand, more steadfastly to believe, more worthily to apply this truth, and vouchsafe to accompany with thy blessing our present reflections upon it. We implore it of thee in the name of our lord and saviour Jesus Christ, and trusting in his promises with filial confidence we further address thee in his words: Our father, &c.

PROV. XXV. 2.

It is the glory of God to conceal a thing. Or, It is the glory of God to conceal his ways.

ARDENTLY as numbers, perhaps the generality of mankind, desire to unveil the dark recesses of futurity, and to read in the book of fate, so pernicious would it be to them, were their wishes gratified. Idle curiosity, discontent, indolence, a defect of just and solid principles of thought and conduct, infidelity and scepticism in matters of religion, are the primary sources of these foolish desires; and the more common and prevalent those errors and defects are among mankind, the more general and active also is their avidity to pry into futurity and to discover the particulars of their lot. Hence the great stress that is laid by so many on predictions, presages and prognostications, on the interpretation of dreams, on auguries and omens, or on other less usual effects of a heated or deranged imagination. Hence those various kinds of superstition and imposture, the follies and extravagancies of soothsaying, of astrology, of necromancy, of the conjuration of spirits, in ancient and modern times and even in our own. Hence the ineffectual research into pretended revelations and prophecies, and the vain expectation of some strange superior illumination, which

which impose upon unwary and unreflecting minds. Hence the abuse of holy writ for solving curious questions concerning futurity, or for deciding such cases and determinations as have an influence upon it. Hence lastly, that blind reverence entertained by so many for fanatics, distempered enthusiasts or mischievous impostors who set up for seers of secret things, for adepts in occult sciences and interpreters of profound mysteries, and boast of an intimate converse with superior spirits, or with the deity himself. All sheer weaknesses and deceptions, certainly not honourable to the human understanding at any time, but are a peculiar disgrace to our otherwise enlightened age. — There are however also intelligent and well-meaning persons, who, without striking into such dangerous obliquities, or employing such fallacious means for gratifying their curiosity, yet cannot forbear wishing to know some particulars of what futurity conceals, and perhaps even deem the lack of this knowledge a defect in happiness. Perhaps there is not one of us, who has not on more than one occasion harboured this desire and been more or less disquieted by it. But does it require much or deep reflection to convince ourselves that the accomplishment of this desire, or the gift of foreseeing future events with certainty, would be extremely prejudicial? No, as the wise monarch in our text informs us :
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It is a glory to God to conceal his ways, his doings, his plans and designs, their concealment evinces their immensity, their profound reasons, their indissoluble and inscrutable combination : so with equal propriety we may add : It is a benefit to man, that God conceals from him his purposes and ways, and does not permit him to know the future. Let us reflect on this subject more at large, my pious hearers. Permit me to shew you, how well it is for man, that his future destinies on earth are for the most part concealed. These considerations will on the one hand teach us to revere with filial submission the wise goodness of God, and on the other to be satisfied with the settlement and condition of our present state in general, and with the measure of light vouchsafed to us in particular. Both together form the ground and source of real happiness.

That the future is concealed from man, that he is ignorant of the destinies that await him here on earth, is well for himself, and well for the persons with whom he lives in society.

For himself it is well with regard to his agency and the application of his faculties ; in respect of his virtue ; and with reference to the prosperous and adverse events and contingences that are drawing towards him.

First then in a view to his activity and the application of his faculties. Whatever, my
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pious hearers, promotes the greatest possible activity of man in its proper direction, at the same time promotes his perfection, is a real benefit to him. And this does the uncertainty and concealment of the future; and therefore it is a benefit to us. Were it not for the impenetrable veil that is thrown over futurity, the generality of mankind would sink into sloth and inaction, surrender themselves entirely either to a careless, effeminate, sensual life, or to a corroding sullenness and sorrow, and therefore not do and become in this first stage of their rational existence, what they are here designed to do and to become.

For instance, would the youth unfold his various capacities to that degree, would he employ and apply his several powers in such a variety of ways, acquire such a fund of miscellaneous knowledge, or so much ingenuity and dexterity; would he take so much interest in whatever relates to human concerns and affairs, and endeavour to fit himself for occupying such various stations, for performing the functions of so many offices, for transacting such different businesses, for executing so many works, for enduring so many checks and mortifications; would he with so well-furnished a mind, with so sensible a heart enter into society, into domestic and civil relations, and exchange his youthful years in such generous sentiments and exertions for the
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age of manhood, if the future were not hid from his view? How very differently would he behave in all these respects, if he precisely foreknew the station, the post, the business, the sphere of action that awaited him; if he had the previous knowledge of what he was to do or not to do, execute or not execute! If he perhaps foresaw, that all his preparatives and accomplishments would in some respects be useless, that he was acquiring insights and abilities, which he should never be able to apply or use, that others would circumvent him in his pursuits, or reap the fruits of his labour; if he perhaps foresaw that he should abruptly leave his career shortly after his entrance upon it, or exchange it for another more toilsome, that he should be cut off in the flower of his age, or scarcely reach the meridian of life? How greatly would this abate his industry? How easily might it, how often would it render him dispirited and dejected? And how much would the formation of his mind and manners, the expansion of his latent capacities and powers, his spiritual, lasting perfection, suffer from all this! How greatly would he be retarded by it in his progress to his future superior destination!

With the activity of the ripened man, the greatest and most useful of all, the case stands exactly the same, my pious hearers. Would the

the man so indefatigably and unremittingly exert his faculties, so assiduously and cheerfully employ his talents and skill, so patiently and resolutely sustain the inconveniences and burdens of his station and calling; would he so strenuously prosecute the affairs and avocations of domestic and civil society, engage in intricate, extensive and hazardous undertakings, so laboriously sow and plant in the hopes of a distant harvest, deny himself so many amusements and accommodations for the sake of a future enjoyment; would he form so many plans and calculations, begin so many works, which require for their execution and completion whole series of years; would he consequently so complete himself, and render so much service to society, as he actually does under his present ignorance of future events? Would not his resolution tire, his ardour abate, if he could foresee all the opposition, the difficulties, the crosses and disappointments, the dangers that await him; if he knew how few of his enterprises would finally succeed, how few of his plans he would execute, how few of his works he would complete, how much ingratitude, how much vexation and sorrow he would reap perhaps from his best and most public minded exertions, what a perverse and pernicious use perhaps his children, his posterity would make of his property and the privileges he had obtained; or if
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he had a prescience of the mortal disease, the inevitable accident that was to arrest him in the midst of his career and precipitate him into the grave! What other motives would then be sufficient to protect him from indolence and prostration of mind? How much would this oblige him to abridge the number and extent of his plans and enterprises, and how greatly would his contemporaries be the sufferers by it! How many powers would remain unemployed and unimproved, what capacities undeveloped!

Perhaps however it may be said, mankind would never then employ their faculties in vain, but would always apply them to some specific, fixed point, and thus bring far more matters to effect. But that would probably be only the case with a few. The generality, having the infallible foresight of their office, their vocation, their business, their limitations and connections, would coincide with their natural propensity to indolence, and undertake and be inclined to do no more than just what would suffice to the attainment of those specific purposes. Nay, by shunning all exertions and labours that were apparently to no purpose, they would presently be tempted to avoid those that were both necessary and profitable. In short, many of their capacities and powers would remain entirely unproduced and unexercised; and yet, what should here be principally remarked, far, far more

more depends, in a view to our real perfection, on the use and the exercise of our powers, than on what we bring to effect by them without us.

Well as it is for man respecting his activity and the application of his powers, that he has not the foreknowledge of future events, it is no less well and profitable for him also as to his morals and his virtue. Had he the foreknowledge of futurity, he would in numberless instances be determined entirely by outward objects, by constraint and necessity, in his choice between good and evil, between right and wrong, which is at present founded on discriminating sagacity, on consideration, on the use of his moral liberty. How could he learn to abhor and eschew the evil as evil; how to revere and love the good as good, if he always saw certainly and clearly before him the painful and pernicious consequences of the one, and the pleasing and beneficial effects of the other, if he could never act, without having constantly in view the penalty or the recompense of his actions? And supposing, that in this case he would do less evil and more good, granting, that he would then do no evil but always pure good, yet thus would his intrinsic, spiritual perfection, his apprehension of truth, his moral sense, the best pitch and direction of his judgments and inclinations be no more furthered than they are in the slave who is continually under

under the inspection and authority of his taskmaster, and is guided by his inviolable orders and irresistible authority in every step that he takes. — Under that supposition how small would be man's preeminence above the brutes ! How much more blindly and mechanically than rationally and freely would he act ! To how little purpose would his soul be animated and exalted by a principle of reason ! Now, that the future is shrouded in impenetrable darkness from him ; now, that he cannot certainly foresee either the several near or remote consequences of his actions, he must reflect on their internal nature and quality, on their conformity or nonconformity to the laws of truth, of order, of propriety, to the will of his creator and sovereign, to his affinities and connections, and decide according to the general result. Now, that all external objects, all future vicissitudes and events are so uncertain to him, he must look more at the essential and durable, and learn to adhere to fixt principles, to safe rules of prudence, and seek in himself, in his temper and judgment, that stability and repose, which he would vainly look for without him. Now, that virtue and vice do not always in the present state bring their reward and their punishment along with them, and the whole train of their proper consequences and effects is concealed : he can love and practise virtue for her own sake,

sake, for her intrinsic beauty and excellence, and learn to abhor and avoid vice on her own account, for her peculiar infamy and ugliness, and so acquire a predominant, uniformly active liking to the former, and a determined, indelible aversion from the latter. And how much nobler and purer is his virtue thereby become? How much more filial his obedience to God and his trust in his providence! By this means he learns to submit entirely and unconditionally to God and his will, on dark and rugged as well as on luminous and even paths; to revere his decrees and dispensations even when they seem adverse and injurious to him; to hearken to his laws without repugnance even when in particular instances he cannot discover the reason or the utility of them, and even then to trust in him and assuredly to expect of him only good, when all appearances are at variance with his hopes and expectations. And this, my pious hearers, stamps on his virtue and goodness a mark of dignity and sublimity, which otherwise they could not have.

If however it be well for man with regard to his agency in general, and to his moral agency, or his virtue, in particular, that futurity is concealed from him; it is also very well for him respecting the fortunate and unfortunate events and contingencies themselves, which are advancing towards him in futurity, and which it
conceals

conceals from him. In the uncertainty and manifold vicissitudes of all earthly things, he enjoys the good much more quietly and completely, and meets the evil far more unconcernedly and bravely, than if he were acquainted with his future destiny. And in fact, my pious hearers, if I with certainty foresaw the prosperity that will happen to me, the eminently good and agreeable, that I shall live to see, how impatiently should I wait for it! How much would the good, that I already possess and which might render me truly elate and happy, lose of its value in my sight! How absolutely insipid perhaps become to me! How much real enjoyment of life should I probably throw away, on account of the approaching greater, more complete enjoyment! And how extremely seldom after all would this future good come up to my expectation, for the very reason that I had so long and so wishfully seen it coming, and had represented to myself all the advantages and delights of it so frequently and in so lively a manner by anticipation! How much would many lucky incidents of various consequence and magnitude lose by not being unexpected!

And how could I serenely and gladly possess and enjoy the good that I have, if I certainly foresaw the earlier or later loss of it, which at any rate is unavoidable as to all terrestrial and visible

visible things, if I foreknew the time, the circumstances and the consequences of it? How could ever the husband, the father, the friend, without uneasiness resign himself to the sweet, the generous sentiments of love and friendship, and be happy in the indulgence of them, if he knew that his wife, his child, his friend, would within a few days, or weeks, or months be ravished from him, or by sickness and misfortunes become to him an object of pain and distress! How could the man of reflection, employed in digging for wisdom and truth as for hid treasures, the philanthropist, the patriot, ever watchful and concerned for the interests of his brethren and devising means for the advancement of their welfare, how could they calmly enjoy the pleasure arising from this noblest application of their mental powers, if they knew the hour to be nigh, which would break the chain of their reasonings and defeat their public-spirited designs and projects?

Whereas now, that futurity is concealed from me, I enjoy far more calmly and completely all the beautiful and good that I possess, all the delights of love and friendship, all the charms of agreeable and hopeful prospects, the pleasure of promising speculations, of works and enterprises happily begun. I am well aware indeed, and often poignantly feel it, that all these things are transitory and frail, that I sooner or later shall

that all, even the most liberal relief, afforded to the miserable, would be entirely thrown away! How soon would congratulation be dumb and converted into grief, if we knew that the occasion of it would cease in the course of a few hours, or days, or weeks! So indubitable is it, my pious hearers, that the obscurity, in which God has wrapped the future, and concealed his ways and designs, is well and salutary for mankind.

All of us may indeed conceive that there are particular cases, where it would be useful for a man to foreknow the future, where that prescience would preserve him from follies and crimes, from misery and misfortune, where it would render him more serviceable to society. But these cases are rare in comparison with such as would generally arise, and the utility that might occasionally thence proceed, would questionless be far from counterbalancing the mischiefs that must generally ensue. Divine providence acts in all its regulations, and therefore likewise here, by the rule of the greatest possible good. And that a regulation may subsist and effect that which it is designed to effect, it must be general, and if it ever admit of exceptions, they are so few as to come into no consideration against the rule. Thus then it is demonstrated, that the obscurity and concealment of future events is to all of us a real and transcendent boon of providence.

Acknowledge

Acknowledge this, o man, and murmur not because the future is in general concealed from thy view. Rather adore in submission and gratitude the wise bounty of thy God even in this disposition of things. Require not to know more than that with which God has thought fit to acquaint thee. Be not ashamed of thy natural limitations, make no attempts to overstep them, and avoid those as weak or fraudulent persons, who promise to raise thee above them. Leave to the sovereign spirit, the supremely perfect being, in prudent acquiescence and filial trust, the disposal of thy fortunes and the events of time. He surveys all in one unclouded view, the future as well as the past and the present. He takes all things into consideration in his methods and determinations, in his decrees and dispensations; and therefore all his ways are blameless and holy, all his dispensations righteous and unimpeachable. Commit thyself unconditionally and without reserve to him and to his will, repose on him and his all-comprising sway, trust in him and his inexhaustible benignity and power. Enjoy with gratitude and gladness all the good he gives and grants thee, and expect from him, the All-gracious, nought but good, at present and for evermore. Trust in the Lord with all thy heart, and lean not to thy own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.

SERMON XXVII.

The Behaviour of the Disciples of Jesus during his Sufferings and Death, and the manner in which the Evangelists narrate that history, considered as a Proof of their Integrity and divine Mission.

GOD, who art our God and our Father, we rejoice that we know thee, our creator and parent, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent ; we thank thee for all the benefits and privileges, with which thou hast favoured us as christians. Thou hast, by thy son, informed us of thy will and of our destination, and pointed out to us the way we must go for becoming truly and everlastingly happy. In the christian doctrine thou hast vouchsafed us the surest and faithfulest guide through all the labyrinths of this life, the best comforter in afflictions and in death ; furnished with every character of truth and credibility that we can reasonably require. All its contents plainly testify that it descends from thee, the father of lights, the author of happiness, and

and conducts us home to thee. Praised be thy mercy o God, for this glorious, this invaluable gift! Oh that it were as interesting and as salutary to us all, as it might and should be by thy gracious appointment! Oh that we were all attached with firm faith to this heavenly doctrine, confidently committed ourselves to its conduct and guidance, faithfully followed its precepts, and felt its whole efficacy to our tranquillity and improvement! We are here assembled, o God, in thy presence, for the purpose of confirming our belief of this truth. Vouchsafe therefore to bless the meditation we purpose now to begin, continue and end in thee. Cause us clearly to perceive the grounds of the truth, experience its efficacy to our conviction, and do thou impress it so deeply in our minds and hearts, that it may lead us to certainty, and become the unalterable rule of our conduct. All this we beg in full affiance in thy promises given us through our lord and saviour Jesus Christ, who has taught and commanded us thus to address thee: Our father, &c,

JOHN XX. 31.

These are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name.

THE truth of such transactions as happened prior to our times, rests, as is well known, on the

the testimony of those persons who were spectators of those transactions or had themselves a share in them. If the accounts of what they saw or heard of those transactions and what part they had in them, as left in writing by themselves have been handed down to us ; if several of them agreed in committing those facts to writing ; and either set them down at the very time they happened, or not long after : then it is so much the easier to obtain an authentic certainty of what is reported to have happened. If we are certified by the general course of history, from time to time confirmed by evidence, that the written narratives ascribed to them are really derived from them ; then we have only to read those narratives, to compare them together, and from them to infer the character of their authors. The more agreement is found in the principal facts, the less studied uniformity in the collateral circumstances, the more sincerity, impartiality and simplicity respecting the matters related and the manner in which they are related, the more of what is characteristic respecting the persons, the times and the places mentioned in those accounts ; the more certain are we, that the authors of them were honest and credible persons, who had no intention to deceive us by fictions of their own ; and if the things which they affirm, are of such a nature as that they themselves could not be imposed upon concerning them ;
then

then we have all the evidence of the truth and authenticity of their narrative, that we can reasonably require. Apply this, my pious hearers, to the evangelists and their writings, and you will presently perceive how great their credibility is. Two of them, Matthew and John, were eye and ear witnesses of all that they relate, and both the others, Mark and Luke, had diligently collected their accounts from those who must have been best acquainted with the subject. They have left behind them writings, which all antiquity has regularly ascribed to them, and which have been held to be their writings, by friends and foes, from the earliest ages. They all agree in the main particulars, and all differ in various collateral circumstances. They all are conspicuous for a noble simplicity in their mode of narrating and for a perfect ingenuousness and impartiality. All relate merely what they saw or heard, and refrain from delivering any opinion of their own in the writings, just as persons are wont to write who are only intent upon setting down facts exactly as they happened. Whoever reads their writings with an attentive and unprejudiced mind, cannot fail of concluding that the facts related in them did actually so happen. — In order to illustrate this subject to you, my pious hearers, and thereby to strengthen and confirm your faith in the christian doctrine, we will at this time dwell upon

upon one particular part of the narrative of the evangelists. We will consider the manner in which the history of the sufferings of Jesus is related by them, as a proof of their credibility, their integrity and their divine mission. We shall therefore make it appear, from their account of the passion of Jesus, not only that they were honest men, far removed from all base and selfish views, but also that they were not such sophists as to aim at the promotion of their good designs by well-meant fictions. We shall blend both so together, that sometimes we shall endeavour to set the former and sometimes the latter part of their character in its true light. This will teach us, that, as our text has it, these things were not only written, but are likewise perfectly well adapted to evince that we should believe that Jesus is the Christ, the son of God, and that believing we may have everlasting life.

In the first place we cannot fail of remarking, the great and noble simplicity that everywhere prevails in the narratives of the evangelists concerning the sufferings and death of Jesus. They relate these transactions without any previous arrangement, without art, without passion, even without emotion, in the ordinary language of common life, just as any unlettered person of the inferior class, of sound understanding, would relate what he has seen and heard, and of which he was a witness. The most important circumstances,

stances, the most striking events, the most extraordinary turns and transitions in this history, the most curious allusions that occur, they relate in the same simple, artless, natural style as the most ordinary and daily occurrences. — Their narratives, at the same time have an uncommon mixture of the characteristic, that is, what only they could and ought to say, what was appropriate only to that people, to that time to that subject. Read, for example, their account of the washing of the disciples' feet, of the last supper, of the detection and exposure of the traitor while at table, of their last conversation with their master, of the behaviour of Jesus and his disciples in the garden. And through the whole course of the passion, how many little circumstances do they notice, which only eye and ear witnesses, only persons who were living at the time could remark. Among these, for instance, are the following particulars; that the servant whom Peter wounded was named Malchus; that Annas was father-in-law to Caiaphas, and that this Caiaphas was the very same who in the jewish council had delivered his opinion, that it were better that one man should die for the people, than that the whole nation should perish; that the disciple who procured Peter his admission into the high priest's palace, was already known there, and that the servant of the high-priest, who talked with Peter in the palace,

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was a kinsman of him who had been wounded when Jesus was taken into custody; that it was the custom, annually at the passover to release some one prisoner; that just then Barabbas, a notorious murderer, was in confinement; that the day whereon Jesus was crucified was the preparation-day for the passover; that the principal personages of the jewish nation would not therefore set foot in the palace of the pagan judge; that the upper-garment of Jesus was without a seam, being woven of one entire piece; that the soldiers therefore cast lots for it; that near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene, and the disciple for whom Jesus had a particular affection; that the jews, because of the sanctity of the day, requested Pilate not to let the body remain on the cross; that the side of Jesus was perforated by a spear, and that blood and water gushed through the wound; that Joseph of Arimathea, a member of the council, obtained of Pilate the body of Jesus, that he and Nicodemus embalmed it after the jewish manner and deposited it in a new sepulchre hewn in a rock, in which no one had yet been laid.— All these and a number of other minute circumstances concur in stamping with the highest credibility the history of the sufferings of Jesus, and allow us not to doubt, that the authors of it actually lived at the time and

had

had that share in these transactions that is attributed to them. They transport us among the acting persons ; they accurately describe these persons, the times, the places, the circumstances ; yet as briefly and in a certain sense as negligently, as we are wont to describe persons and things still subsisting, and universally known. They enable us ourselves to see and hear all that passes, neither seeking to conceal anything nor to place anything in a particularly strong light ; they act as persons do who are only intent upon relating the truth. This however is not all.

We farther find in their account of the sufferings and death of Jesus the utmost ingenuousness and sincerity ; the most calm and composed confidence in the goodness of their cause and the undeniable truth of what they deliver ; a dignified carelessness about any seeming contradictions and occasions of cavil or offence. No remark in palliation of their own failings and transgressions : no remark in refutation of the charges brought against Jesus : no remark for obviating or mitigating the offence, that all this was likely to give both to the Jews and to the Greeks. Let us more articulately investigate the subject.

First then no remark in palliation of their own failings and miscarriages. And how various and glaring they were ! How much rea-

son had they to be ashamed of themselves ! One of them was so far misguided by sordid avarice as to betray his teacher, his master, his benefactor ; and, for the sake of thirty pieces of silver, to deliver him into the hands of his wicked and implacable enemies ; though previous to the execution of his infamous purpose he was admonished of it by his master, yet a few moments afterwards he put it in execution : when Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane is seized with a violent agony, and is desirous of seeking some relief in the converse of the most intelligent and confidential of his disciples, they abandon themselves to sleep, and see the greatest perils coming on without sensibility or concern : when Jesus is arrested and carried off by his enemies, they all take to flight ; and, struck with dismay and consternation, leave him to his fate : even Peter, who at first would have imprudently defended him, shortly afterwards thrice denied him in the highpriest's palace : and after his death they shut themselves up in their houses for fear of the jews. What weaknesses, what failings, what culpable conduct ! And all this the evangelists relate of themselves and of their brethren in their own writings, without attempting the slightest palliation or excuse. What a rare instance of sincerity and candour ! Not only to an impostor, but even to a philosopher, who had nothing but his philosophy

losophy for his guide and support, it must have been an object of great importance to set his character in the best, the most favourable light for himself and his cause. Would he needlessly and freely say of himself and commit to writing what would draw on him the charge of timidity, of fickleness, of ingratitude, of treachery, what must necessarily weaken the confidence of those whom he is desirous of gaining to his party? Would he not rather pass over such matters in silence, or render them doubtful, or accompany them with the most plausible excuses? The evangelists do nothing of all this. And what obliged them to such a procedure? Several of these failings and obliquities were known only to themselves, others to but few persons, and all would in a short time have fallen into oblivion. Certainly nothing but their natural and invincible attachment to truth, nothing except their own honesty and frankness, and the consciousness of the superior assistance which they enjoyed, and the powerful, the divine protection which they knew to be exerted in behalf of their cause, could have moved them to write thus of themselves, and thereby expose themselves to the danger of such a suspicion.

Again: no remark in refutation of the charges brought against Jesus, before his judges, by the people and their rulers! And how heavy these charges! Jesus was arraigned of having refused obedience

obedience to the emperor, of inciting the populace to rebellion, of having set himself up as their king, of having spoken contemptuously of the temple, of having blasphemed the Almighty. What accusations ! How much had the evangelists to allege in refutation of them ; how much had they to say of the gentle, peaceable, humane, beneficent, wise and discreet behaviour of Jesus, of his severe and sacred morality, of his exhortations to humility, to meekness, to patience, to the love of enemies ; how many allegations might they have drawn from his character and from his life, in direct opposition to all these accusations, and totally annulling them ? What an opportunity they had for placing the envy, the jealousy, the malice of the scribes and pharisees, the hypocrisy and haughtiness of the rulers of the jewish nation, in the most odious point of view, and for crying vengeance against these accusers and slanderers of the innocent, on these murderers of the greatest benefactor to their nation ! What an opportunity for shewing the indecency, the inconsistency, the violence and fury of the whole of their procedure with Jesus, and thence for inferring the wickedness of their designs ! The evangelists do nothing of all this. They relate these accusations, these artifices of malice, without repelling them, without making the slightest observation upon them. Matthew
alone

alone says, that Pilate knew that for envy they had delivered him. Whence proceeds this seeming indifference to the honour of their master and his righteous cause? Whence this defect of participating zeal? It was the story of innocence that they were relating. This they knew, this they felt; and innocence is its own defender. It was the story of innocence justified by God himself; this pacified them. What they related concerned not their cause, but the cause of God, and they knew from undeniable experiences that it was the cause of God. To him then they might safely resign it, secure in the expectation that he would defend it against every accusation of falsehood and malice, that he would vindicate the honour of his son, his ambassador, and put his opponents and foes to confusion.

No remark in short for removing and mitigating the umbrage which both the jews and the Greeks must naturally take at this unexpected fate of Jesus. To see the man who had given himself out for a teacher sent from God, for the redeemer of Israel, for the messiah promised to the patriarchs and anxiously expected by his contemporaries; to see this man, rejected by his own countrymen who had cherished that grand expectation, accused by their rulers and chiefs, by their expounders of the law, of the most heinous crimes, and condemned and cru-

cified as an impostor, as an enemy to God and his law, what revolting impressions must this make on the spectators and on all who after them should read this history? How at first must it perplex and confound even his disciples and followers; and how apt would they be to infer from their own experience what effect it would produce on others? Wherefore then not take all possible pains to prevent these sad consequences? Could they not have set the exalted character which Jesus displayed and retained unaltered in his sufferings and death, in a clearer light? Might they not have extolled the silent and admirable grandeur of his conduct? Drawn the most advantageous conclusions in behalf of himself and his cause from the wonderful events that happened at and after his death? Shewn how both heaven and earth, how all nature, how the deity himself bore witness to the innocence of the dying Jesus? Remarkd how often the wisest and best of men, the greatest benefactors of their brethren, had undergone a similar fate? The evangelists do nothing of all this. It is true, they tell us how Jesus behaved in the several scenes of his sufferings, when he held his peace, when he spoke, what sentiments he discovered towards God and towards mankind. They inform us what extraordinary events happened at the hour of his death, and what impression they made on some of

of the bystanders. But they intermix no judgment of their own with the relation; draw no inferences from it; neither seek to incline their reader to one side, nor to give him a bias against the other; they relate all they knew, whether it may appear favourable or unfavourable to their purpose; steadily continuing the thread of their narrative with coolness and impartiality, constantly unconcerned about the consequences. Why? They knew that all stumbling-blocks and offences notwithstanding, the gospel was divine efficacy and divine wisdom to them that believe. They were most certainly assured of the resurrection of Jesus. This had divested them of all offence at his sufferings and death; and the discourse accompanied by signs and wonders, concerning his regained life and his glory, must also produce the same effect with others.

And a few farther observations, my pious hearers, on the conduct of the disciples of Jesus during his sufferings and after his death. A conduct that not only raises them above all suspicion of fraud and imposture, but which admits of no explanation, unless with them we confess Jesus to be a divine ambassador in the strictest sense of the term. Had they been disciples of a mere philosopher, who had concerted with him and amongst themselves to deliver to mankind certain useful doctrines, and to corro-

borate those doctrines by suitable fictions concerning the superior descent and the peculiar contingences of their master, they would have adopted a quite different behaviour in those conjunctures, or would have described and related them in a totally different manner. They act in these events not at all upon a preconcerted plan, in certain definite views: this is evident. All is unexpected by them; all surprises them; they know not what to make of the matter; they cannot guess to what it tends; they foresee nothing of it; provide for no emergencies; they do nothing by common consent; they abandon themselves to consternation, to confusion, to despondency. Is this a conduct befitting men, who, according to the foregoing assumption, had been selected by the wisest of all men, to undertake and execute a most difficult and arduous task amidst so many unpropitious and deterring circumstances; men who were to work, upon a very ingenious and comprehensive plan, at the illumination and improvement of the human race, and to that project sacrifice their ease and their lives; men, who by their own wisdom and strength were to put an end to the superstitions, the idolatry, and the vices of both jews and pagans, and bring about the most signal revolutions among mankind?

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Within a few weeks afterwards, however, these very men make a totally different appearance. They are now all courage, all intrepidity, all zeal for the cause of truth ; shunning neither perils nor sufferings, and so continue to their dying days. How is this to be explained, unless in the mean time that has happened which they assert, unless in the mean time Jesus be risen from the dead, and have certified them most authentically of his regained life ? Can people of the character of the apostles all at once so effectually get the better of their versatility, their bashfulness, their timidity, their fondness for the terrestrial and sensual, as thenceforwards, through a long series of years, never to let one symptom of them appear ? Can people, who, from all that we know of their tempers and their foregoing behaviour, had neither intelligence nor sagacity enough, neither the knowledge of mankind, nor the boldness, nor the high-toned mind requisite for inventing, for undertaking and executing so grand and arduous a work as their's, if they had been left to themselves ; can such people, when they think fit, suddenly acquire all these qualities, all these abilities and endowments, uniformly retain them, exert them on all occasions and perform with them such things as they actually did perform, unless they have in the mean time obtained the most palpable proofs of the truth
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of what they affirm, and the strongest assurance of a superior and divine assistance? No, in the nature of the human mind it is impossible to discover the reason of it, unless we have recourse to the supposition of some extraordinary events, by which they were in a manner transformed, by which they were rendered totally different persons, which held the counterpoize to the several manifestations of their weaknesses, defects and failings. If they never thought of entering into such a confederacy as we have supposed, under the direction of their master, who so far excelled them in wisdom, in vigour of mind, in magnanimity and fortitude; much less were they likely to do so after his death, when all their hopes were blasted, and they were without a leader; and that in fact they did not is manifest from the whole tenour of their conduct during the sufferings of Jesus, since we cannot perceive the smallest vestige of plan and design in it, but exactly the reverse.

Yet however incompetent and inconceivable these suppositions and explications be, no less satisfactory is the solution afforded us by the account itself of the matter. If the disciples of Jesus are really what they pretend to be; if they are messengers of Jesus who testify nothing except what they have seen and heard: then all is clear; then all hangs perfectly well together; then they speak and act precisely in every instance

instance as is consistent with their character and the measure of their apprehension and sagacity. They are weak, frail, but intelligent and honest men, who neither seek to impose on themselves or others. They deliver what they see and hear, before and at and after the death of Jesus; yield to the simultaneous impressions which these things make on them in the several conjunctures; have no wish to dissemble or disguise these impressions; and as they acquire new perceptions, new evidences and therewith new powers, they act in consequence, and together with that undesigning honesty discover a wisdom and energy in their conduct, which only the thorough consciousness of veracity could bestow.

Now laying all this together, my pious hearers, we shall not surely incur the imputation of credulity, if, from the behaviour of the disciples of Jesus during his sufferings and death, and from the manner in which they describe and relate their own behaviour as well as the whole story, we infer their integrity and their divine mission. And thus we shall likewise perceive, how justly we may in this respect say with John in our text: These are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name.

We will conclude, my christian friends, by drawing from what has been said, an inference or two for your improvement and excitation.

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Let the remarks which we have made on the mode of narration that prevails in the account of the passion of Jesus, recommend to you the writings of the evangelists in general. These writings, though not remarkable for a fine and florid style, for their studied eloquence, for any deep philosophical observations, yet are distinguishable from all human writings by their amiable simplicity, by the noblest candour, by a natural, unaffected, artless, frank and easy diction. He whose heart and taste are not yet vitiated, here finds a rich and wholesome nourishment for both. Yes, ye friends of nature and of truth, ye honest and ingenuous souls, who being without disguise yourselves, perhaps find not many sympathizing souls around you, to you the perusal, the study of these writings, the thorough knowledge of their important subjects, must be extremely precious; to you must the converse with their authors be peculiarly desirable and delightful. Here you may solace yourselves, when weary of the affectation, the artificial constraint, the insincerity that reign in the world. Here is nothing of that embellishment, that extravagance, that imposing air, that impassioned tone which so frequently detracts from your satisfaction in the writings and discourses of your contemporaries; here you have no need to fear lest your reason, your sagacity, your feelings should suffer violence. In their com-
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pany you are not with persons who make a point of persuading you to espouse this or that cause, of extorting your approbation, of drawing you over to their party or to their interest. They only tell you what they have seen and heard; they leave you to form your own judgment of it; they by no means anticipate you with regard to the consequences that flow from it. They shew themselves to you such as they are, as weak, frail persons, but as honest and faithful disciples of Jesus, as the friends of God and man, who neither seek their own honour nor profit, and even are not over anxious concerning the honour of their master and leader, but only strive, by a simple narrative, to serve the cause of truth. In the intercourse with such men, in the reading of such writings, a sound understanding, an undepraved taste, a good heart, must necessarily find pleasure and information; and the person who brings these properties with him, must thence become always wiser and better.

But likewise let these eminent qualities of the evangelical history, and particularly that part which relates to the sufferings of Jesus, confirm your belief in the truth and divinity of the christian doctrine. By such internal marks is the credibility of every author, of every historian judged. Where we perceive such unaffected simplicity in the narration, such sincerity and candour, such impartiality, such an easy train
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of discourse, free from all solicitude about the consequences ; there we cannot refrain from exclaiming : Here is truth ! Here is nature ! This is the language of the honest man ! This is the style of integrity ! Thus speaks the credible witness, who is sure of what he affirms ! And what is the title of that book, that history, in which these characteristics of credibility are more numerous, more manifest and more striking, than in the writings of the evangelists, than in their accounts of the sufferings and death of Jesus ? Wherefore then should they only here be of no validity, only here be disallowed ! Would not this indicate a strange partiality on our part, would it not discover a mind already prepossessed against them ? Would it not imply a conceited and eccentric or a strangely perverse turn of mind, refusing to be satisfied with the most natural evidences, the most adequate to the nature of the case ; but requiring others, fetched from more profound and abstruse arguments, only comprehensible to a few persons ? O my dear friends, disown not the language of nature, of simplicity, of integrity ; misconstrue not the voice of truth ! Judge not of it according to the customs and manners that now prevail in the world, or in books, but from the temper and exigencies of the times and the persons, when she spoke by Jesus and his apostles. Sometimes seek stillness and retirement,

ment, that, free from all distraction, ye may hearken to that voice with a quiet mind. There give it access to your heart, observe the impression it makes upon it, the emotions it excites; see whether these dictates of truth, whether these emotions be not suited to your nature and your wants, whether they are not beneficial, noble, soothing; whether they do not kindle in you a love to God and man; whether they do not elevate your mind, expand your heart, and recreate you with prospects and hopes, worthy of the wise and bountiful creator, and of his rational creature capable of such high perfection. And if ye find it to be so, oh then hold fast this truth: it is from God; as is evident from the effects it produces within you, and the source from whence you have drawn it. It is from God: for it makes you wiser and better and happier. It cannot lead you astray; follow it boldly, hearken to all its dictates without hesitation and without exception. Ye will continually better apprehend the voice of truth, more and more revere her commands, more and more confidently lean to her guidance. And thus will she lead you safely through all the labyrinths of this transitory life: she will conduct you to Jesus, who announced her to you, and to God, the original fountain of light and truth and happiness.

Sunday next before Easter.

SERMON XXVIII.

*The Account of the Sufferings and Death of
Jesus considered as a Proof of his exalted
Character and his divine Mission.*

GOD, who art the almighty arbiter of heaven and earth, and art infinitely exalted above all that we are able to conceive or think, thee we revere in deep prostration as the creator and lord of us and of the spacious fabric of the universe. Thee we adore as our benefactor and father. Thee, with united hearts, we thank for all the spiritual and corporeal gifts and graces that we possess, for the light that enlightens us, for the consolation that revives us, for the hope that inspires us. O God, how great things hast thou done for us, in order to procure us this light, this consolation and hope! What proofs of thy more than paternal providence and love hast thou thus vouchsafed to confer upon us! For the advancement of our best, our everlasting interest thou sentest thy son, thy beloved, into the world, and gavest him to die for our sakes;
thou

thou hast presented us in him with the most perfect teacher and saviour, certified us through him of thy favour, informed us of our destination and our duties, and smoothed to us the way to the supreme felicity, and we have abundant reason to be satisfied in this gracious revelation of thy will. Therefore, praise, everlasting praise, be ascribed to thee, the Father of mercies, the God of all consolation! Ah may we always esteem those inestimable graces and benefits of thy free bounty, as what they truly are; and be taught of thee duely to prize, and worthily to use them. Grant that we may continually acquire a clearer and more distinct apprehension of thy goodness and always increase in the true honouring of thee and of Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent, that our faith in him and his divine doctrine may be still more firm, our obedience to his commands still more voluntary and cheerful, and our trust in his promises still more complete. Bless to the furtherance of these designs the considerations in which we now propose to engage. Let them enlighten our minds and convince us of the truth, and let that conviction be permanent and fruitful in good works. Accept our homage, and hear our prayers which we offer up unto thee, in the name of Jesus Christ, thy son, who in compassion to our infirmities, among his other lessons, taught us also how to pray. Our father, &c.

MATTHEW XX. 17, 18, 19.

And Jesus going up to Jerusalem, took the twelve disciples apart in the way, and said unto them, Behold we go up to Jerusalem; and the son of man shall be betrayed unto the chief priests, and unto the scribes, and they shall condemn him to death, and shall deliver him to the Gentiles, to mock and to scourge and to crucify him: and the third day he shall rise again.

OUR Saviour here announces to his disciples his approaching sufferings and death. He speaks of them circumstantially and with positive apprehension, as consequents and effects well-known to him though yet dormant in their principles, and which would at a stated time have birth. This notification of his sufferings, which, as we learn from the evangelical history, he several times repeated, represents to us his character on an extremely venerable side. Even though we should not infer from it, that he prophetically foresaw his future destiny in consequence of a divine revelation; which however, from his foretelling so articulately what depended for its accomplishment on such a number of free actions of mankind, is extremely probable, yet we cannot surely fail of perceiving, at least his honour and probity in this procedure. He scorns to flatter his followers by raising false expectations in their minds. He neither seeks to decoy nor to retain adherents by promises of emolument

emolument proportionate to their desires. He acquaints them of events, that are in manifest opposition to their former expectations, that annihilate at a stroke all the brilliant prospects of temporal authority and power by which their imaginations had so often been charmed, and which must necessarily enervate their belief in him and his doctrine, abate their courage, and exceedingly perplex them. Instead of the throne, which they fancied he was to ascend as the king of Israel, instead of the victorious dominion over all the nations of the earth which he was soon to acquire, instead of the high posts of honour to which he was to elevate them and the rest of his friends, in his kingdom; he advertises them that he shall be betrayed into the power of the chief-priests and scribes, delivered over to the authority of the heathens, that he shall be insulted, scourged, condemned to death, and die upon the cross: and in regard of themselves, he gives them explicitly to understand, on various occasions, that they have to expect a similar fate, that scorn, ignominy, persecution, pains and death awaited them. Is this the conduct, is this the language of a sly deceiver, or of an ambitious politician, who aims at forming a party for enabling him to attain his selfish purposes? Is it not rather the conduct, is it not the language of the most ingenuous temper, of the purest attachment to truth,

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of the most consummate integrity? Yes, is it not the conduct, is it not the language of a person whose mind is superior to all that is sensual and earthly, and looking solely at the things that are invisible and eternal; of a person, who is conscious of such views, and is appointed to such a work, as requires no carnal, worldly prudence to promote, and which must be attained and accomplished, in spite of all opposition, because they are the views and the work of God, who is able to bring light out of darkness, and by means apparently weak and incompetent, to fulfil the counsels of his eternal wisdom? — — — The purport of my present discourse, however, is not to insist on this prediction of the approaching sufferings and death of Jesus, considered as a prophecy. I have read to you the words of our text, my pious hearers, not so much as a prediction of the approaching sufferings and death of Jesus, as considered in the light of a compendious account of them, in order to ascertain the character of our saviour from this account, and to confirm our belief in his divine mission. To me the detail of his sufferings and death is a stronger proof of his divine mission and the heavenly origination of his doctrine. It urges me to honour him as the representative, as the son of God, and convinces me that he was that which he gave himself out to be. Perhaps under the di-

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vine assistance and blessing I may be so happy as to represent the subject to you in the same light wherein it appears to me. Accompany me with the more attention, as your interest is so much concerned in being fully persuaded of your faith.

Lately, my friends, on another occasion, we told you, that if we would have a rational and firm conviction of the truth of christianity, we must keep to the main object; and that we may be completely at ease in this respect, when we have sufficient grounds for certifying ourselves, that Jesus, the founder of the christian religion, neither sought from impure motives to impose on others, nor was himself a deluded enthusiast, nor even a mere well-meaning and judicious moralist, but not sent from God. These grounds I find among others in the account of his sufferings and death. It furnishes me with the strongest proof of his integrity, the strongest proof of his composed, sedate and prudent temper, the strongest proof of his more than human sagacity, of his divine legation.

First then the proof of his integrity. It is scarcely needful, my pious hearers, to adduce this proof, it is so clear and luminous to every reflecting mind. If Jesus were not compelled to his sufferings and death; if he voluntarily encountered them, and if he maintained in them the same character that he had before assumed :

then must all suspicion of imposture, all suspicion of terrestrial and temporal motives fall to the ground. An impostor, or a person, who under the pretext of religion, seeks riches, or honours, or authority and power, or sensual pleasure, will he without necessity surrender himself into the hands of his haters and persecutors, and submit to the most painful sufferings, the most ignominious death? Will he select as a means to the confirmation of his lies, what deprives him for ever of all hopes of accomplishing his corrupt designs, and is extremely prejudicial to his cause in the eyes of both his friends and his foes? What was it that could move Jesus to resign himself to the cruelty and rage of his adversaries, and even rush upon death, if under the mask of sanctity and virtue he had sought to gratify inordinate passions, or to prosecute secular ends? Was this the method to satisfy those passions, or to attain those ends? Were the punishments inflicted on slaves, was the ignominious death of the cross, the way that could conduct him to the throne of Israel, procure him fame, or gain him adherents? But did he not voluntarily chuse all these? Did he not submit to them of his own mere motion? Might he not easily and in various ways have avoided his sufferings and his death? He was apprised of the present temper of the people and their rulers,

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knew the dispositions of his disciples and scholars, was sensible of what he might promise himself from them or not, how far he might or might not rely upon them. He could not therefore, with his undeniable prudence and circumspection, have been attacked unawares by his enemies. He had likewise means enough before him of escaping their snares. The passover was at hand; a festival at which millions of persons from all districts of the jewish territory and the neighbouring countries flocked to Jerusalem. How easy would it have been for him to have avoided observation among such a vast concourse of people! Nay, how easy to have drawn over a great part of these people, who, with such anxious impatience were looking for a temporal deliverer, only by condescending to flatter them in that expectation, by only amusing them with some hopes of its accomplishment, and putting himself at their head. And how easy would it have been for him, if even at that time he had failed of his purpose, to have saved himself by flight, under favour of the general confusion, and to contrive some better measures for the execution of his defeated project? Hear we not even his bitterest foes, the chief priests and the scribes, saying, with great concern: Not on the feast-day, lest there be an uproar among the people? And is not then a war, the issue of which is at all

times uncertain, and in which a man may at least acquire a reputation for fortitude and courage, and has a chance of dying in what is called the bed of honour, is not that far preferable to an inevitable, lingering and ignominious death? Would an impostor, when reduced to the necessity of chusing between the two, ever make choice of the latter? No, as certain as it is, that Jesus was not compelled against his will to his sufferings, that he might have escaped them in various ways, and that he, of his own election, after mature deliberation, submitted to them, and endured them with unalterable firmness, so certain is it likewise, that he pursued no base designs, had no terrestrial interests in view, but by the last scene of his life gave the strongest proofs of that honour and probity, which we admire in him throughout the whole of his antecedent conduct, which confirmed the absurdity and inconsistency of the accusations brought against him, and which his judge himself was forced in the most solemn manner to acknowledge. Hence it is, that the opponents of christianity have but rarely, and then always to their own disgrace, presumed to cast a slur on the pure, the holy, the venerable character of Jesus, by this improbable charge of imposture and fraud. But so much the oftener have they pretended, though from arguments equally weak, and with no better success, that he was
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the dupe of his own credulity, or a fanatic deluded by a heated and deranged imagination to boast of a peculiarly divine illumination and inspiration, and to fancy himself a more important personage than he really was. But to this pretence also the history of his sufferings and death is in manifest opposition.

As it affords me the strongest proof of his integrity, so it presents me likewise with the strongest proof of his unclouded intellect, of his composed, sedate and prudent character. And in fact, my friends, when I hear Jesus immediately before his sufferings discoursing with his disciples on these sufferings and on the consequences of them in a calm and placid temper and with admirable wisdom, and consoling and instructing them with all the tenderness of a father and friend, but in a mild and submissive tone; when I behold him in the garden of Gethsemane representing to himself these very sufferings in their real nature and extent, feeling in the most lively manner the pains and ignominy of them, dismayed and agonized at the sight of them, putting up prayers to God for the removal of them, and yet submitting to the will of his heavenly father and acquiescing in it; when I observe with what patience and indulgence, even in these awful circumstances, he treats his feeble-minded friends, how kindly he excuses their failings, and what wise rules of conduct he gives

gives them ; when I consider in what a calm and sedate temper he advances towards his enemies, confounds his betrayer without vehemence or invective, gently upbraids them that seize on him with the injustice of their proceedings, mentions neither his prerogatives nor his merits, blames the impetuosity of one of the disciples, and provides for the safety of them all ; when I see that he preserves the same serenity of soul undisturbed through all the scenes of ignominy and pain, is ruffled by nothing, complains of nothing ; makes no answer to the charges and accusations brought against him, says nothing of the malice of his enemies ; and when he is forced to speak, does it with impression though not with acrimony, in few words and with the utmost prudence ; when I remark, that he takes not the slightest pains to defend his cause, to gain protectors and adherents either to that or to himself, or by apt and pertinent remonstrances, to confirm or to retain such as he already has ; when I perceive, that he neither appeals to his innocence, nor calls on God to be the witness and avenger of it, nor threatens vengeance on his adversaries, but implores forgiveness on them, and weeps for their misfortune ; when I behold, that while upon the cross, though he suffers from pain, and seeks not to conceal it, he yet remains composed and calm, fixes his hopes on God, comforts the wretches
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who are suspended near him, provides for the sustenance of his mother and the welfare of his favourite disciple, and commends his spirit into the hands of God, as his celestial father. On revolving all this in my mind, I cannot discover the least symptom of fanaticism, or of a heated, disordered imagination, but directly the reverse of that character, namely, sound and sedate reason, composed and manly wisdom, and yet very delicate human feelings. No; the fanatic in similar conjunctures would have shewn a quite different behaviour; he would not have felt his sufferings, or would have violently suppressed and carefully concealed his feelings; he would have zealously defended the good cause for which he was brought to suffer, and have sought to interest the judge and the spectators in its behalf; he would have employed his last hours, his remaining strength in extolling what he held the most important truth, in informing the ignorant, in rousing the indifferent, in confirming his followers and friends; he would have gloried in his sufferings, have thanked God for the honour he had done him in calling him to undergo them, have declaimed against the prevailing swing of corruption in his unfortunate times, or by some other speeches and actions have discovered symptoms of a bewildered imagination and a distempered mind; a mind entirely prepossessed and absorbed by the interests

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of a particular cause, for the maintenance or the advancement whereof he haughtily despises infamy and pangs and death, whose faculties are all directed to one sole point, and is blind and deaf and insensible to all things else. Symptoms totally foreign from the character of Jesus; so many considerations which must surely acquit him in the breasts of all impartial judges from every suspicion of fanaticism.

But perhaps Jesus may have been nothing more than a mere human moralist, whose desires to promote the improvement and happiness of his brethren, though they did not absolutely derange, yet so far possessed his imagination with the high conceit of the utility of his doctrine to mankind, that in confirmation of it and for giving to it a proper degree of weight and authority, he had recourse to fictions, and at last sacrificed his life to his benevolent design? No, my friends, I find in the detail of his sufferings and death no more traces of such an enthusiasm, than I do of deceit or fanaticism; nay, I am unable to explain the whole account unless I ascribe to Jesus more than human intuitions, unless I admit a divine mission. I will not affirm, that fictions of the kind which we might here assume, may not comport with the character of a real sage, who was magnanimous enough to give up his life for the benefit of others. I will only make this one remark, that Jesus, by the voluntary susception of these sufferings,

ferings, would have acted in manifest opposition to the character of such a sage and to his own benevolent designs. Such a sage must have endeavoured to be as long useful to the world or to the society, to whose service he had devoted himself, as he possibly could. Jesus lived and taught in public only a few years. He had not proceeded far in the illumination and improvement of his countrymen, or even in the instruction of his disciples, who were hereafter to supply his place. The prejudices and vices which he combated still reigned almost without controul: the light that he diffused over his brethren, still only resembled the dubious dawn of day. It was extremely probable that the prevailing darkness would shortly again over-power it. The good grain which he had strewn was scarcely beginning to shoot, and required to be longer tended and fostered ere it could ripen, and bear fruit. In such conjunctures the sage would not quit his post, except by compulsion, or on being weary of his undertaking, and when sinking into complete despondency. Neither of these suppositions can be alleged of Jesus. In his behaviour hitherto no symptom is to be perceived of abated zeal or a dejected mind. Too much consideration is discovered, too much firmness, too uniform sedateness, too great courage, in all his discourses and actions; he evinces too much controul over his bodily feelings, too confirmed indifference to outward objects,

objects, too much force of mind, for allowing us to suppose with any semblance of reason, that he was all at once become so profoundly dejected or that he had so soon and so suddenly abandoned all hope. Neither was he compelled by outward circumstances so early to quit a career on which he had scarcely entered. For, besides that, as we before observed, it was very easy for him to have withdrawn from notice in so populous a city, or to have gone out of it into some retired and unfrequented place; besides, I say, he had already acquired sufficient esteem and affection among the people, with any degree of precaution in his behaviour, to have been safe from open violence; and in forecast and discretion he certainly could not be deficient who on so many occasions gave such proofs of his discriminating sagacity and profound knowledge of the human heart. The government of the Jewish nation at that juncture would have eased him of any sollicitudes about his maintenance, to which his design would have connected him every way. The numerous parties into which the people and their rulers were split, and the rancour and animosity that subsisted between them, would have furnished him, who knew them all, with various means even for extricating himself out of far more perilous circumstances than any in which he had hitherto been involved. And why should one who had made no scruple falsely to give himself out for the son of God and to make a
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cloak of religion for promoting his other benevolent purposes, have had any hesitation, occasionally to say or to do what was agreeable to this or that party, that would have protected him from the hatred and persecution of the rest, drawn off their attention from him and directed it to their own concerns, and which would therefore have given him time and leisure for being longer useful and for further prosecuting his beneficent plan? What merely human moralist has ever made it a matter of conscience, to employ such circumstances to his own profit or to the advantage of truth and virtue? Paul himself, who was however more than a simple moralist, though not equal to his lord and master, the mediator and redeemer of mankind, and was appointed to lay down his life for his brethren, did so. When he was brought before the council at Jerusalem, and was in danger by an untimely death of being prevented from a farther propagation of the gospel, he began to speak on a subject, which though true and important, was at the same time adapted to incline a considerable part of the council to his side, and to convert them, from enemies, into friends and protectors. Jesus, who yet had not lived so long in quality of teacher and improver of mankind, does nothing like it, he voluntarily goes forward to his sufferings, which he might easily have avoided, without any dereliction either of truth or conscience. Neither does he take any the
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least pains to refute the false charges and accusations that are brought against him, to expose the malicious designs of his enemies, to make his innocence apparent, to bear at last one solemn public testimony to that truth for which he laid down his life, and thus to awaken the better part of the people to reflection, and strengthen those with whom his doctrine had already found acceptance, in their good dispositions. How is such a behaviour as this to be reconciled with the character of a sage who had hitherto been labouring so zealously at the illumination and improvement of his countrymen? Yes, if from his sufferings and death any considerable benefit was likely to arise to the success of his cause, then his extraordinary and unprecedented conduct may be explained. But this there was not the slightest reason to expect. Had Jesus been an ordinary man; if the cause he carried on were his own, and not the cause of God; if he had no certain knowledge, that it was the will and determination of God that he should now die, and that therefore God himself would direct the consequences of his death and lead them to beneficial purposes: then he could reasonably expect nothing else than the total ruin of his benevolent scheme and the discomfiture of his public-spirited views. He might with certainty foresee, that his crucifixion would be to the jews a stumbling-block and to the Greeks foolishness; and therefore he ought to have avoided that rock
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of offence, have pursued his honourable course and employed all the means that prudence could suggest for the attainment of his grand object ; and he would certainly have done it, according to all that we otherwise know of him, had he been merely a moralist, not sent from God, had he not been really that which he gave himself out to be. And in fact, my friends, we may consider the matter how we please, but we shall never be able to draw any other conclusion from it. If Jesus, with the excellent moral character which he unquestionably possessed, and with the noble objects which we here suppose him to have in view, but resting solely upon human wisdom, had laboured, instead of three or four years, thirty or forty years at the illumination and improvement of his countrymen ; if he in that time had sensibly weakened the dominion of error and vice ; if he had formed a considerable number of persons into thoroughly enlightened and strenuous votaries of truth and virtue ; if he had freed at least a small proportion of the disciples and scholars that he usually had about him, from their prejudices and moral defects, brought them to a truly perspicuous knowledge and firm conviction of the doctrine, which after his death they were to preach to mankind, and by long practice had rendered them fit for the great and arduous task which they were to perform, and for which they were naturally so unqualified ; if moreover in the
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doctrine which he commissioned them to promulgate, he had avoided all that must of necessity give offence, and what, according to all human apprehension, could yield neither comfort nor improvement: if Jesus, I say, had done this, and then have submitted to death, and so sought to turn the consequences to profit by his apostles as is here supposed, then this conduct is reconcilable with his wisdom and with his views. But, that in the prime of his manhood, in his full vigour, in the flower of his age, when he had scarce begun to work, and yet was working not without hopes of success, when the harvest, as he says himself, was great and the labourers were few, when on one hand he could yet do so infinitely much good, yet give sight to so many blind, yet reclaim so many wanderers, yet emancipate so many slaves of vice, yet comfort so many troubled souls, yet form so many teachers and promoters of truth and virtue for future ages; and when on the other hand he was not wanting in encouragement to that end, but might have indulged the well-grounded expectation of a far more general and lasting improvement of his brethren, that amid these conjunctures and with such views, he should voluntarily rush upon death, and yet, neither before nor at that period, not the smallest token of abandoned projects, of being satiated with life, of despair or repentance as to the resolution he had taken should once be perceptible from him, is what, my friends, cannot

be explained, what cannot be reconciled with the character for wisdom and probity, which both friends and foes must grant him to have possessed, if he had been a mere wise man, if he were not the legate of God, as he gave himself out to be, if he had not had the strongest assurances that it was the will of heaven that he now should die, and that the deity who had sent him would not leave his commenced work unfinished, but would gloriously carry it forward, however contrary to that expectation all outward circumstances might be. — But on the other hand is Jesus the ambassador, the son of God: then is his conduct in respect of his sufferings and death, perfectly consistent with the character he had hitherto maintained; then all its parts are coherent and compact; then may be fully explained all else that we know concerning him. Now he does nothing except what God would have him to do. Now he accomplishes, by his voluntary sufferings and death the decrees of heaven in a view to the redemption of mankind, and leaves the consequences of them in perfect confidence to him who conceived those decrees and established those means of our pardon and pacification. Now might he terminate his course not long after he had set out upon it, and yet be assured that he had reached the goal. Now, with serenity of mind, might he transfer his scarcely commenced work of the illumination and improvement of mankind, to his scholars, though in all

all respects so weak, timid, wavering, earthly-minded and destitute of all human wisdom. Now he had no need to fear lest they would divert from him the offence of his cross, or that his premature death would too soon leave them to themselves, to their small share of sagacity, and their still smaller stock of prudence. He knew that his resurrection and the various incontestable evidences of it that he would give them, would as it were mould them into new men, and arm them with an invincible courage, with an alacrity that should make them look with contempt on hardships, contumely and persecution; he knew that God would endue them with his holy spirit, bestow upon them particular gifts of wisdom and understanding, that he would even impart to them the power of working miracles, and thereby capacitate them for gaining over innumerable adherents to the preaching of the crucified and resuscitated Jesus. Thus was he therefore most positively assured, that he should not fail of the design, the magnanimous purpose, for which he came into the world, for which he had hitherto been teaching, and for which he was now to suffer. Thus might he, at the very time when all his endeavours were seemingly defeated, when his enemies and the enemies of truth and virtue, were enjoying their triumph over him, exclaim, like a hero secure of the victory; It is finished. Thus might he commend his spirit, with firm reliance, into the hands of his father, knowing

knowing that on earth he had done and executed what he was to do execute according to the will of God.

And thus, my dear friends, the divine majesty of Jesus shines through his abasement. Thus he shews himself, even in the solemn hour when he submits to the violence of his enemies and dies upon the cross, as the ambassador of God. Thus ought we to consider the time of his sufferings and the manner in which he met and endured them, as the strongest proof, that he neither was actuated by any impure, terrestrial motives, nor was a fanatic deluded by the force of his imagination, nor a mere sage, but the son of God, an extraordinary teacher and master of mankind sent from God into the world. This, my dear friends, this should strengthen us in the belief in him and his doctrine, shield us against all the attacks of ridicule and cavil, and render the gospel to us an effectual means of salvation. His doctrine indeed in itself is excellent, it contains the best and surest directions to consummate virtue and happiness. But only then is it thoroughly adapted to our pacification and improvement, when we recognize it as the doctrine of a divine messenger. Not till then does it acquire energy and authority enough for controuling our furious passions, for subduing our carnal lusts, for arming us against the strongest temptations to sin and wickedness, for consoling us in the most afflicting distresses, and for supporting us eve-

in the hour of death. Only then does it acquire sufficient force and authority for subduing our whole heart and all its passions, and for moving us to a thoroughly willing, cheerful and steady obedience to the laws of order and perfection by bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ. Thus then let us constantly consider and use this doctrine, my pious hearers. We have every inducement to it that we can reasonably require. The character of Jesus is by no means ambiguous. The more we make ourselves acquainted with it, the more carefully we compare all the parts of his behaviour and the events of his life together, the more shall we be confirmed in the conviction of his divine mission. And this is the main hinge whereon every thing in the christian religion turns. If we are impartial and honest enough to adhere to this leading point, to venerate Jesus as the delegate of God, and faithfully to follow his precepts and his example according to the measure of light and abilities that God has bestowed upon us; then assuredly our faith will never fail, it will become more and more fruitful in good works, ever richer in comfort and acquiescence to us, and hereafter lead us to that exalted height of felicity to which God through Jesus Christ has called us.

Good-Friday.

